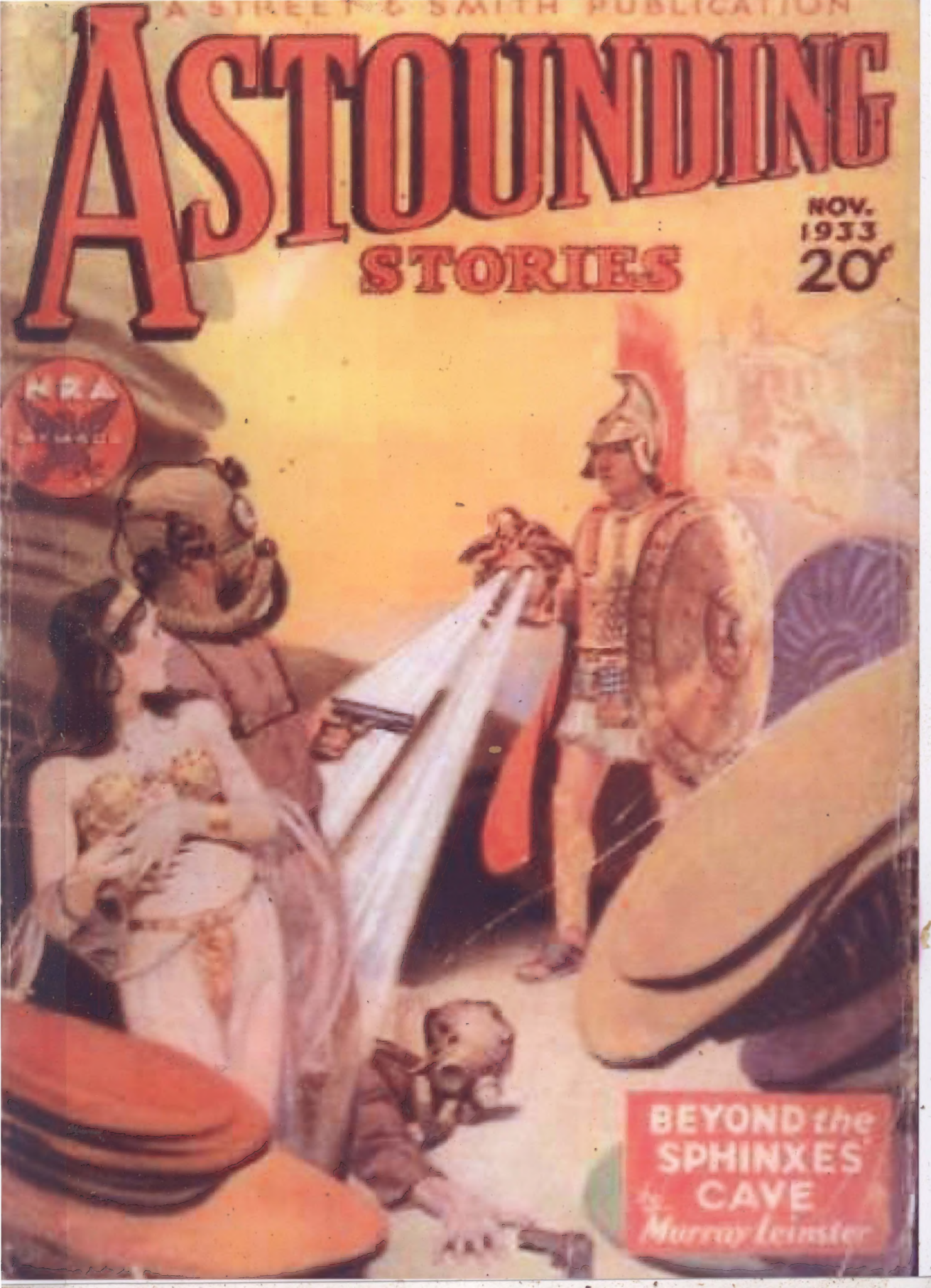
A STREET & SMITH PUBLICATION

ASTOUNDING STORIES

NOV. 1933
20¢



On Sale Third Wednesday of Each Month

VOLUME XII
NUMBER 3

ASTOUNDING STORIES

NOVEMBER
1933

A STREET & SMITH PUBLICATION

The entire contents of this magazine are protected by copyright, and must not be reprinted without the publishers' permission.

Table of Contents

Short Stories:

THE LOVELY GHOST 21
by Stuart Jackson

PRISMS OF SPACE 27
by Robert H. Leitfried

IN THE SHADOW OF THE TII 43
by Ainslee Jenkins

DEAD STAR STATION 54
by Jack Williamson

THE MAN FROM CINCINNATI 70
by Holloway Horn

MY LADY OF THE TUNNEL 101
by Arthur J. Burks

Novelettes:

BEYOND THE SPHINXES' CAVE 2
by Murray Leinster

PLANE PEOPLE 74
by Wallace West

TELEGRAPH PLATEAU 114
by Harl Vincent

Next Month:

Gripping, thrilling, fascinating,
THE TERROR OUT OF TIME
by Jack Williamson

Single Copy, 20 Cents — Yearly Subscription, $2.00

Monthly publication issued by Street & Smith Publications, Inc., 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y. George C. Smith, Jr., President; Ormond V. Gould, Vice President and Treasurer; Artemas Holmes, Vice President and Secretary. Copyright, 1933, by Street & Smith Publications, Inc., New York. Copyright, 1933, by Street & Smith Publications, Inc., Great Britain. Entered as Second-class Matter, September 13, 1933, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under Act of Congress of March 3, 1879. Subscriptions to Cuba, Dom. Republic, Haiti, Spain, Central and South American Countries except The Guianas and British Honduras, $2.25 per year. To all other Foreign Countries, including The Guianas and British Honduras, $2.75 per year.

We do not accept responsibility for the return of unsolicited manuscripts. 16

To facilitate handling, the author should inclose a self-addressed envelope with the requisite postage attached.

STREET & SMITH PUBLICATIONS, INC., 79 7th AVE., NEW YORK, N. Y.

Beyond the Sphinxes'

JIMMY FLYNN took a last look through the shaft-house door. The blue sky of Greece hung overhead. There were olive trees and vineyards on a slope stretching away to eastward. Mount Olympus, the legendary home of the gods, loomed against the skyline to the north.

Greek soldiers lounged about the entrances to the mine buildings. The gnarled, peasant faces of miners peered in at the mine in which they had flatly refused to work because of mysterious things happening far below ground. It was closed by government order, now.

Blanchard, the American manager of the mine, hooked on an automatic pistol, handed another to Jimmy, and patted pockets containing chocolate, flashlights, extra batteries, and shells.

"I'm ready," he said briefly. "The mine's been closed two days. If anything did happen, it'll happen again now."

"I'm ready, too," admitted Jimmy.

Blanchard picked up a portable telephone which would unreel its own wire and slung it over his shoulder. He stepped over to the shaft and got in the cage. Jimmy joined him. They dropped like stones down the long, long shaft. The first level echoed the rumble of

Cave

Beauty, and horror, and things of nightmare shape lay beyond that cave—in the Hades of ancient Greece.

by MURRAY LEINSTER

Unwinkingly it gazed at them—and drew them back—back—back!

the dropping cage. The second. The third and fourth. The cage checked its speed. It stopped with a jerk at the fifth level, and the air was damp and chill and filled with an elusive, nauseating odor.

Jimmy sniffed, testing the air with mine-wise nostrils. Blanchard sniffed likewise and looked grimly at Jimmy.

"You notice that smell? It's the first time I've encountered it, but it's what the men described. We've timed this thing right."

Jimmy nodded grimly. Blanchard plugged in the phone and spoke into it.

"I smell the peculiar odor that has been reported. We shall investigate it. We are starting now."

He adjusted the reel on his shoulder. Jimmy was sniffing more intently. The odor, though faint enough, was stronger than it had been. And there are distinct classes of odors, even among the scents of animals. A dog has one odor, and a horse another, and a mouse and a red deer can be identified by smell alone.

Four thousand feet below the olive-clad slopes of the Olympian hills, with the rugged walls of a

mine-drift all about him, Jimmy said slowly:

"If it weren't insane, I'd say that I smelled a cat of some sort, and at the same time a snake."

Blanchard started to move forward. The telephone reel made a twanging sound as it paid out its wire behind him.

"If you're crazy, Jimmy," he said jerkily, "you're not alone! Two men were heard screaming in the drift that's ahead of us. Other men went racing to them. They found blood on the floor and the cap of one of the men. Nothing else, except a musky smell. The men had disappeared.

"I investigated, and learned nothing. I set a big force of men at work here, and nothing happened. I stayed with them, to see. Two days later another man vanished. He'd worked in this drift with the regular gang. They knocked off for the day. But he'd left a tool behind, and he went back for it. They heard him screaming suddenly. They went into babbling panic, and it was fifteen minutes before I heard of it.

"I came down again. Nobody would come with me. I found practically nothing. I stopped work in this drift. And four men vanished from the level above in five days. Their screams were heard. That was all. No bodies, no traces—nothing! They screamed, and vanished. The other men quit."

Blanchard's voice was echoing hollowly as they moved forward. Somewhere, far away, there was a slow dripping sound of water falling drop by drop. The lamps flung a vivid light ahead. Naked rock showed, just as it had been torn away by explosives and men. Nothing else.

But Jimmy felt the hair beginning to rise at the back of his neck. There is no more ghastly sensation in the world than to be alone in an empty mine. The thousands of feet of rock overhead seem to press down upon one. The utter loneliness is horrible, even when a way of departure is known. But this feeling of horror was more than that.

"Don't you think," said Jimmy in the echoing silence, "that it's about time you told me the truth, Blanchard? I'm here, and I smell something which smells as if it were alive. You said you found 'practically nothing,' which means you did find something you didn't dare tell about. What did you find?"

Blanchard turned on his flashlight, flung it ahead, and turned it off again. He seemed to play it on the floor.

"I found a—a footprint," he said harshly. "A beast's footprint, but no beast ever known on earth! That's why I brought an automatic and gave you one. If I'd told you on the surface, you'd have thought me mad. Perhaps——"

He stopped with a catch of his breath and listened in the ear-cracking silence. The roaring of the blood in his ears was audible. But there was nothing but the distant *drip-drip-drip* of water——

Yes! There was the sound of a stealthy movement! But it ceased and did not come again, though Blanchard waited till the breath burst from him in a gasp.

Jimmy said quietly:

"You were wise not to say that in sane sunlight. The smell is stronger, now."

"I know it," said Blanchard in a high, strained voice. "I think——"

He stopped again to listen. The smell grew stronger still. It was almost overpoweringly strong. Jimmy said softly:

"You've been talking loudly to

draw attention to us. Now keep quiet."

He turned off his lamp, making swift, certain movements in the shadow of the wall. And there were other stealthy sounds—which neither of the men had made—and the nauseous odor swept forward like a wave.

And then Jimmy Flynn saw it.

His automatic came slowly out of his holster. The thing was looking at Blanchard. Jimmy froze in incredulous, almost superstitious awe.

Suddenly Blanchard stiffened, seemingly in every muscle. He flung his head from side to side, as if trying to break some invisible bond. And then he took a stiff step forward. Jimmy took an equally stiff pace with him.

"Don't look at it!" gasped Blanchard. "Don't look! It's—got me, somehow! I—can't draw my gun! I—can't do anything but walk toward it! It's—like a snake fascinating something!"

He took another step forward. "Get out of here! Get out while it's holding me with its eyes! Quick! *Quick!*"

His foot lifted and moved forward. Jimmy's foot lifted and moved forward. The thing backed slowly away, drawing them after it steadily——

"Get the shaft guarded!" panted Blanchard, with sweat standing out on his forehead. "Machine guns! Bombs! If—if you can shoot, it may take its eyes from me and I can do something! Make a noise——"

There was a small crashing sound. The portable telephone he had been carrying scraped backward over his shoulder and fell to the floor of the drift. And nothing happened.

Blanchard moaned softly. He stepped forward again, a straining, battling automaton. And Jimmy moved with him, walking with stiff muscles, keeping step and keeping pace. They followed the unbelievable thing with stiff, mechanical, fascinated steps, while waves of a nauseous effluvium filled Blanchard's nostrils to saturation.

II.

THEN JIMMY'S automatic emptied itself with a roar, and a bedlam as of hell let loose began. The shots echoed and reëchoed in the rocky tunnel. The ears of the two men rang and stung. And even after the echoed crashings died away in the lowest level, they could hear them still booming back and forth in the rocky galleries of the rest of the deserted mine.

Blanchard staggered on his feet. The thing kicked and writhed, leaping madly about. Then it collapsed, and sounds which seemed almost to be syllables bubbled out of its mouth. Then it was still.

Blanchard gagged as he looked at it. Then he was throwing a flashlight all about. Nothing. Then he looked at Jimmy, who looked like some weird monster himself in the gas mask he had put on.

"Good God!" said Blanchard shrilly. "What is it? Is it—human?"

Jimmy looked down at the thing he had killed. And the horrible part of it was that it did look human, in part. The face had a woman's eyes and nose, and a woman's chin, and a woman's throat. It was impassively, terribly beautiful. But the paws were in no wise human, and there was kinky, golden fur all over its beast's body.

"It looks," said Jimmy, in the voice of one who is inclined to be sick, "it looks as if human beings somewhere or somehow had bred

with beasts and produced this—sphinx, I guess you'd call it. I waited to kill it till it had led us to its hole. That smell it gives off probably stupefies you so it can fascinate you, and my gas mask saved me. Wait a minute."

His flashlight steadied on a tiny gap, up near the roof of the rocky tunnel. One foot, perhaps, by a foot and a half or two. It looked like a shadowy recess where a bit of rock had fallen down as the tunnel was cleared. Actually, there was a steady draft of wind flowing into it. Jimmy thrust his flashlight through and followed with his head. He drew back.

"A cave," he reported. "A passageway, anyhow. Are you satisfied with the killing of that one thing? Your men must have passed through here, though."

"We'll look for their bodies," said Blanchard through chattering teeth. "And I'm putting on my gas mask right now. That thing——"

But Jimmy was already scrambling up. Blanchard followed at once. The two of them were in an apparently natural fissure in ancient rock. It was four or four and a half feet high and probably six feet wide. It seemed to pinch out behind them, but it seemed to enlarge as it went farther on.

The two of them moved onward cautiously.

Then Jimmy seized his companion's hand. He snapped off his flashlight. At a pressure of Jimmy's fingers, Blanchard snapped off his, too. Then the darkness seemed to weigh upon them with the pressure of millions of tons of rock, until Jimmy whispered softly:

"Over to your right!"

There was a faint, violet-white glow visible there. They moved toward it with a tremendous stealthiness. Fifty yards. Sixty yards. Seventy——

The light seemed to grow brighter. And then Jimmy saw its source. Crawling, he came to an opening where the passage enlarged. He looked down perhaps a dozen feet into a nearly circular but obviously natural cavern in the virgin rock. And he saw the light.

It was a steady, unwinking flame, burning without a sign of fuel atop a tripod of golden metal. The three legs of the tripod were elaborately carved and decorated. It was a thing that looked at once very ancient and very modern. The pattern and decoration of the tripod were archaic beyond belief. But the light——

"Good God!" panted Blanchard. "Men have been here!"

Jimmy, staring intently, nodded with tight lips. And suddenly he pointed to one side of the circular cave. There were rags there; blue denim rags that once had been clothes worn by a Greek peasant miner. There were other things there, too, and the recognition of what those tattered bits of flesh had been was sickening. The floor of the cave was filth, pure and simple.

"I'm going down," said Jimmy curtly.

He made his way down the rocky slope to the filthy floor. He moved forward, and then stopped as if shot. He had a diamond ring on his finger, and it was glowing vividly, even when he held up his hand so that the diamond was in shadow. The stone seemed to glitter as if on fire. He seized Blanchard's arm and dragged him back.

"What do you hear?" demanded Blanchard hoarsely.

"It's what I see," said Jimmy. "That light is death. See my diamond? X rays make it fluoresce. Nothing else will. Keep away from

that light! We need special clothes for this job!"

Blanchard opened his mouth to speak, and then pointed, speechless. There was a long corridor opening out of the rounded cave, and there seemed to be some intersection or crossing passage at the limit of the light. And something was flowing past that intersection. It was alive. It was serpentlike, but it was four feet thick! It was spotted and uneven in color. It was monstrous in size. It moved with a horrible quietness. It did not walk, it *flowed!*

The breath left Blanchard's body in a wheezing gasp. Jimmy felt himself going pale to the lips. The soundless motion went on, unhurriedly, and then the size of the thing seemed to lessen, as if it was tapering off down to an extremity. And suddenly the end of it—blunted and rounded, no more than a foot in diameter—went smoothly past the passageway, and they could see nothing at all.

"I think," said Jimmy unsteadily, "that that thing, whatever it is, is a bit too big for automatic bullets to handle. But I am recalling that if we go back to the surface and report, we will be locked up as lunatics. We can't go yet."

Blanchard pulled himself together.

"I'm still game," he said between clenched teeth. "But we could take back the tripod.

Jimmy smiled grimly, looking at the scintillating, blazing diamond on his finger. He had seen X-ray burns.

"On the whole," he said grimly, "I'd prefer being locked up as a lunatic. We'll explore a bit farther."

He brought out his automatic and held it ready. He advanced slowly and with infinite caution along what seemed to be the only exit from the sphinx's den. There was only silence, the ear-cracking silence of these abysmal depths. Blanchard followed closely. They went cautiously to the intersecting passageway. They stopped there with a shudder, and listened, and presently —greatly daring—Blanchard flashed a light along its length.

But the passage along which the colossal thing had moved was curved. They could see nothing. Jimmy flashed a beam along the other way. Something round and white and still showed up clearly. It was a puff-ball, a toadstool, some gigantic fungus growing two feet high and more.

Without a word, Jimmy moved toward it. The rocky roof rose before them, and suddenly they seemed no longer confined, no longer oppressed by an awful weight of stone above their heads. There was a feeling of open space before them; empty, open space. There were toadstools growing, and shelf-fungi, and thin, many-branching growths which crumbled as Blanchard blundered against one of them.

Suddenly Jimmy exclaimed under his breath and snapped off his lights. Blanchard followed suit.

For an instant, the darkness seemed absolute. Then a vague, distant, flickering glow swung them about. And as Blanchard gasped in sheer incredulity, a crashing sound began a quarter mile away.

Their flashlight beams shot out. A human voice called desperately. The crashing kept up. It was growing nearer. The voice called more desperately still. It was a woman's voice, hunted and terrified and crying out for aid. And then a figure leaped into view, and it was white and human and in awful, terror-stricken flight straight for them.

Jimmy flung forward, though Blanchard was not a second behind

him. Flash beams boring into the murky darkness all about, they plunged through clouds of dust from exploding fungi in the instant, unreasoning response of their kind to the outcry of a woman in danger or fright.

And the flashing white body fled toward them, and something leaped from behind—something shaggy and horned—and brought it to earth, and a voice growled throatily, and something came furiously toward them—and Jimmy and Blanchard were pouring lead into a creature seven feet tall that was bounding upon them.

Their beams lighted up shaggy, furry hide. Their guns crashed again and again, and the thing bleated and staggered and crashed to the ground.

"It's a damn good thing," said Jimmy composedly, "that the local forms of life aren't especially tenacious of it. This girl knew we were humans by our lights, evidently. Watch that thing, Blanchard."

He bent down over the slender figure on the ground, flung there by the creature they had killed. Jimmy looked, and made an exclamation in a choked voice. He switched off his lights swiftly. Gradually he became aware that the distant flickering glow produced a constant, shadowless twilight all about. And then he heard Blanchard's teeth chattering.

Blanchard's flashlight was playing on the head of the thing they had shot. And this thing looked human, too. It had a hooked, aquiline nose. It had eyes that must have had a human look not long since. It had a manlike beard, though its mouth was more horribly sensual than any man's could ever be. But there were two horns springing from its forehead, and its body was covered with shaggy fur, and as Blanchard's hands shook, the flashlight beam wavered along the monstrous body, and the legs ended in delicately formed cloven hoofs.

"God!" cried Blanchard in a shaking voice. "What is this thing? What is this place we've come to?"

Jimmy spoke with an unnatural composure from where he cradled a slim figure in his arms, with shadeless twilight all about.

"You've heard of it often enough. It's described at length in the Greek legends you learned in school. Two men have gotten back from it—Heracles and Orpheus. I'm beginning to understand things. We're somewhere under the mountains that were supposed to be the homes of the gods. And of course there's only one place we can possibly be. We're in hell."

III.

"THE OLD Greeks," he added, "called it Hades. It seems to be real."

A winged thing fluttered overhead, monstrous in size. It could not be seen too clearly in the shadeless twilight, but Jimmy sent a beam from his flash toward it. He drew in his breath at what the beam disclosed. The flying thing fled in panic.

"Think!" said Jimmy. "That first creature we killed, in the mine, looked part human. Maybe it was. We back-trailed it to its lair, and found a light there which was full of X rays and ultra-violets and God knows what else. It's like no light on earth above, and it would kill us if we were exposed to it, but it didn't harm that sphinx. I call it a sphinx because it had a woman's face and a beast's body and it used its eyes to fascinate, like a snake. Then we came out here and killed another thing, and it matches up with the

natural history of the old Greek legends. It would be a satyr, according to the old descriptions. So you see——"

Blanchard snapped off his lights, and the twilight seemed to become more noticeable and somehow more horrible.

"I've—I've gone mad!" said Blanchard thickly. "That's it!"

"No," said Jimmy. "I think we're both likely to wind up lunatics, but I'm holding fast to my explanation. Those rays from that tripod would burn our flesh, in quantities. In lesser quantities they might cause cancer, or they might——"

He swallowed. "They've used X rays on fruit flies, Blanchard. X rays do something to any organized cell tissue. They stimulate it, but nobody can foretell how. On fruit flies, when they're too weak either to sterilize or kill them, they produce freaks. X rays make fruit flies lay eggs that hatch out monstrosities. Creatures without wings, or too many. Without legs, or with multitudes of them. With two heads, and three and four—— Do you see?"

Blanchard's breath seemed to stop. "You mean——"

"Suppose," said Jimmy, "that a long time ago there were people living in a cave like this. Suppose that there were radiations in the soil, in the rocks, caused by the stuff that makes that tripod light glow. Suppose the people didn't die, but that those radiations affected them as X rays affect fruit flies. They'd produce monstrosities. Some of the monsters would die. Some of them would live—perhaps insane. And they might mate with animals. And the same unholy radiations, which stimulate all cell tissue in unpredictable fashions, might even make those offspring of monsters and beasts fertile, and capable of producing other monstrosities more horrible still——"

Blanchard muttered thickly in the shadeless twilight amid the huge fungus things, and staring down at the shaggy body of the half human creature he had killed only minutes since.

"Suppose that in ancient days there was some communication with the upper air," said Jimmy, "and that some of those ghastly things went upward and were seen by men. Four thousand years ago. Three thousand years ago. What would half-savage folk like the ancient Greeks believe?"

Blanchard said hoarsely:

"They'd think—they saw gods!"

"They'd make legends of them," said Jimmy. "They'd make tales of sphinxes, and satyrs, and—what was that thing that flew away when the light struck it?"

"It had a woman's head," said Blanchard, shivering.

"They'd probably call that a harpy," said Jimmy. "Blanchard, this—thing that looks like a girl is coming back to consciousness. I saw her face. It's beautiful as I never thought a woman could be beautiful. And—I'm frightened!"

There was silence. Blanchard fixed his eyes upon the slender white shape that lay in Jimmy's arms. His eyes were growing accustomed to the twilight, now. He bent down.

"She's human," he said slowly. "She's human! But Jimmy, I never saw a woman like that!"

It was Jimmy's teeth that chattered now.

"I looked at her," he said unsteadily, "in the light. And I—I'm in love with her, from that one glimpse. And I'm remembering that besides satyrs, and harpies, and sphinxes, which can be killed, there

are legends of nymphs, and vampires, and—and sirens, Blanchard. They killed the men who loved them. And—and—*what is this girl in my arms?*"

There was no answer. The twilight had not lightened in the least, but the slim white figure took clearer and ever clearer form as their eyes grew more accustomed to it. And the sheer beauty of the girl was breath-taking. There were sandals on her feet, which seemed to be made of brass somehow fashioned to be flexible. There had been a fillet about her head to confine her glorious dark hair. The remnant of some thin garment—ripped and shredded in a heart-rending struggle—only partly concealed the firm young flesh beneath. It was held to her body by a belt of brazen or golden plates, in which there was an empty dagger sheath.

She stirred, and sighed faintly, and Jimmy's heart pounded uncontrollably. And then she opened her eyes.

Blanchard was bent down, staring fascinated at the almost unearthly beauty of her features. Her eyes fixed upon his goggled, gas-masked features. And then she gasped in horror, and her hand went groping toward the pathetically empty sheath at her waist.

In a flash Jimmy had his own gas mask off and caught her arm in a reassuring grasp. Her eyes flickered to him, and then she clung to him, gasping out an unintelligible sentence.

Jimmy stood up, and he was aware of a strange sense of absurdity in that he was laughing softly. He showed the girl his mask, put it on, took it off, put it on again.

"Take off your mask, Blanchard," he ordered, his voice shaking from his relief. "She thinks you're a monster, too. She's human, Blanchard! Thank God, she's just as we are!"

Blanchard obeyed.

The girl was staring at him incredulously. She went close, with a swift, lithe movement. She touched his face with her fingers. And suddenly an excited smile flashed across her face, and she burst into happy, thrilled speech. There was but one word that Jimmy caught, and that only because it was repeated—"Theophori." She clasped one of Blanchard's hands, and one of Jimmy's, and stood between them with her eyes shining, looking from one to the other with her breast heaving in inexplicable delight.

Jimmy spoke.

"Blanchard, the first thing for us to do is to get her to some place of safety, and then try to find out how to talk to her."

"Back to the mine, then," said Blanchard. "To our own world."

But the girl shivered suddenly, staring off into the twilight. She released one of her hands to point. And something was coming out of the tunnel from which the two men had emerged into this monster cavern. They saw a long neck with an impossible head coming out of the living rock. They saw a second head emerge. Then a third. And then a single body.

It came out for ten feet, for fifteen, for twenty. It was not walking. It flowed! The body was four feet thick and taller than that. It was spotted and uneven in color. It moved with a horrible quietness. And gradually its movement slowed and stopped. Its three heads writhed and twisted, gazing about. Gradually it became still, a horrible parody of an earth creature sunning itself part in and partly out of its den.

But the light in which it luxuriated was a horrible gray twilight that seemed never to alter or change. The way of return to the mine, at least, was blocked.

IV.

"IF WE CAN kill it," said Jimmy grimly, "*if* we can kill it, its body fills up the tunnel, and that's the only way we know back to our world. We can't move a thing that size. We'll have to wait till it goes away."

But the girl tugged at them. She pointed behind her. She spoke eagerly. Jimmy listened in a queer hopelessness, not of life, but of comprehension. But he caught a word. Then he caught another. And suddenly he said urgently:

"Blanchard! Listen to what she's saying! It's Greek! Ancient, archaic Greek! Together we may pick out her meaning!"

They listened with feverish intensity. They knew modern Greek as a matter of course, but modern Greek is not the language of the age of Pericles, and the words this girl was using were of more archaic structure still.*

She stopped, looking eagerly at the two of them. And Jimmy spoke quietly.

"Guessing at half of it," he observed, "she says we're waited for by all the Theophori. They must be her people. And if we can dodge the—some kind of monster I can't guess at, because I only caught the word for thunder—she'll take us to them. She was to be given to the monsters. We've saved her." He paused. "What say?"

Blanchard looked back at the cave mouth from which they had emerged, and at the unthinkable creature sunning itself in the horrible gray twilight. Something stirred, a long way off. It took to wing suddenly and fluttered away in the heavy dead silence that seemed to hang here always.

"We'll mark our way," said Blanchard, "and go!"

They nodded to the girl. She laughed softly to herself and bounded forward. The floor of the mighty cavern dipped downward here, and they moved forward with their lights turned on full. If there were monstrous things that sighted them, they drew back from the spots of electric flame.

And then, as the floor of the cavern dropped away, they saw its vastness more clearly. It was colossal. It must have been miles across.

Vast stalagmitic columns seemed to support the roof here and there. But far, far away they saw the origin of the persistent twilight. There was one place where a quite impossible sunlight seemed to shine.

Sunlight? No, because it flickered and wavered constantly; but a bright, glowing, golden light nevertheless. And where that bright light was brightest, there was an uprising of the rocky floor, as if to provide a site for a vast acropolis. And the acropolis was built there.

They saw structures made as if of gold, gleaming and glittering in the

*Note: The process by which the purely Hellenic words in modern Greek have changed from the older forms is perfectly well known. On the lips of casual speakers, consonants have a tendency to be formed ever farther forward in the throat and mouth. Even in English this process of labio-palatization may be observed. The Norman-French name *"Guillame,"* from its guttural beginning of 900 years ago, has moved forward in the throats of its speakers until now the initial sound is formed by the palate and lips, i. e. *"William."* Its contraction, *"Bill,"* begins with a sound formed by the lips only. In the Arcadian dialect of modern Greek, words may be observed which formerly began with a sound equivalent to *K*, which passed through a stage, still preserved in other dialects, in which they are pronounced as beginning with a *T* (farther forward in the mouth), and in Arcadian are now pronounced with the purely lip-formed initial sound of *P*.

flickering light. There were walls and battlements and terraces. The girl pointed to them and shivered, speaking in a frightened voice.

Blanchard stared blankly.

"Unless I'm crazy," he said uneasily, "she says that there's where the gods live."

Jimmy nodded.

"It would be," he observed. "Yes. Decidedly it would be."

And just then, quite suddenly, from the tip of the topmost battlement a streak of flame burst out. With the speed of lightning, it flashed in a jagged dart to a spot below and far from the battlements' base. Flame flashed where it struck. And seconds after, there was the crashing roll of indubitable thunder.

"Zeus," said Jimmy calmly, "has flung a thunderbolt at somebody. Poor devil!"

The girl was shivering, but she caught at his arm and nodded.

"Zeus!" she repeated. "Zeus!"

And then her face blanched, and she clung desperately to Jimmy, and buried her face, as if from a sight too horrible to be borne.

Because no more than thirty feet away a man was standing, looking at them. He had a shining golden helmet on his head, and he carried a brazen shield on his arm, and he wore a hoplite's sword and the brazen greaves of ancient sculpture. He was smiling, but the smile was so derisive and so malignant and so utterly cruel that Jimmy's lips twisted into an answering snarl.

Leisurely, the man brought his hand from behind his shield. He held up a bit of golden sculpture. It was a face, a woman's face, a thing of pure horror with serpents writhed about it.

"The Gorgon!" gasped Blanchard. "I've seen——"

But he never finished. The sculptured eyes seemed to flash. Jimmy felt a sensation of agonizing cold. And then he felt his muscles stiffened in the terrific rigor of catalepsy. The girl froze to stone in his arms. Blanchard toppled like a carved image, his limbs inflexible. And Jimmy—braced by the girl's body—stood erect with all the horrors of death, because he was utterly unable to move a muscle. Even his eyes were fixed and staring, though he was conscious of every sensation.

He heard a laugh, derisive and mocking and inhumanly cruel. Then a female voice spoke. The voice was soft, and seductive, and luring—and it was horrible. He saw something which was female, but not wholly human. It moved about him. The man spoke in the same archaic Greek the girl in Jimmy's arms had used. Jimmy translated the words in his own mind.

"Garden of the gods—comedy of agonies—he's one of the gods, damn him, and he's going to take us to their damned city——"

Then he felt a net being cast about him. He remained frozen, motionless. The same net infolded the girl in his arms. It tightened suddenly, and he felt himself lifted upward. Blanchard bumped against him. For an instant their eyes—fixed and staring—looked into each other's. Then the net soared upward from the earth, and Jimmy was tumbled to the bottom of it.

Whatever carried them, flew, but flew low. Never more than forty or fifty feet up, there were times when the net soared upward from the growth below. But presently the light grew stronger and sickly vegetation appeared, freakish and monstrous like all else in this incredible region.

And then the golden light became

stronger still, and Jimmy's whole frame became filled with an awful anguish. He realized that it was the power of motion returning to him. Slowly, sweating blood in his agony, he became able to move one arm. Then the other. He heard Blanchard moan softly. And then there was a tiny sobbing sound from the girl, as of a cry wrenched from behind tightly clenched teeth.

Then, with a sudden exquisite painfulness, the entire power of motion returned to Jimmy. He struggled in the net, wet with the sweat of agony. Seconds later, Blanchard was able to move. The net was of chains woven so thread-thin that they cut into the flesh that pressed against them, but strong as steel.

"I'll shoot the thing that's carrying us——" panted Jimmy. "I'll—I'll shoot——"

But Blanchard gasped a negative, pointing down. And whatever it was that was carrying them was rising higher. They were a hundred feet up. Two hundred. Golden metal walls glittered beneath them. They had a vision of battlements, coated with metal, and then of green things growing below, and of ponds and lakes and elaborately landscaped gardens.

And then the walls soared upward again and there was what seemed to be a terrace of marble or ivory, and a confusion of moving, brightly colored people, and they dipped down, and dropped the last ten feet with a sickening jerk. It seemed deliberate.

Blanchard was fighting the net savagely when Jimmy staggered upright. Its meshes gave, now, and suddenly they were free. Blanchard was cursing bitterly under his breath, but Jimmy felt some one clutching at his legs, and bent down and lifted the girl to her feet. He felt her quivering in terror as she shrank close to him.

Then Jimmy saw the man who had laughed at them and pointed the golden Gorgon's head at them. He was flying! Standing in what seemed to be a strap slung from his shield, he held it aloft above his head and went slanting downward to the marble pavement in a clean glide, exactly as if that shield were the thing which supported him in the air. He landed lightly, touched something at the back of his shield, and lowered it and slung it carelessly over his shoulder as he walked, laughing, toward the brightly clad folk who reclined or moved languidly about a glitter of gold and jewels.

Jimmy's voice was cold and hard.

"We're here, Blanchard, whether we like it or not. I imagine that since this is the place where the gods live, it may be considered heaven. Incidentally, these people have a civilization away ahead of ours in some respects. That Gorgon's head must be a sort of ray projector that shoots out a paralyzing ray. We'll want to shoot that chap first. Understand?"

"I'm crazy," said Blanchard in thick-voiced rage. "I know I'm crazy! But I'm going to get him! Ready?"

The girl was speaking in their ears. She was utterly, deathly white. She was filled with that ultimate horror which is past mere terror, but she spoke to them. She put one arm about Blanchard's shoulder and patted him gratefully. She pressed close to Jimmy, looking with wide, horror-filled eyes at the group of languid and gayly colored people at the farther end of this space of marble. And suddenly she looked up at Jimmy and kissed him, quite simply and trustfully, and

then stood with her hand clutching one of his tightly, with the pitiful erectness of one who waits for death. She faced the leisurely figures to whom their captor spoke amusedly.

"She said these are the gods, and we die," said Blanchard hoarsely. "Do we open fire, Jimmy?"

"Just a minute," said Jimmy coldly. "They'll probably say something. But remember to shoot at the chap with the Gorgon's head first. We owe him something. We owe him a lot!"

Heads began to turn toward them. And these people were fashioned wholly like the humanity of upper earth, but there was no trace of humanity in their regard of the three figures brought captive to their midst. They looked at the three abstractedly, boredly, indifferently. Not as if they were servants or slaves. Not even as if they were animals. But as if Jimmy, and Blanchard, and the slim, young, half-nude girl between them were some unimportant form of vermin, to be exterminated because they might possibly be annoying.

One of them spoke in an abstracted, incredible indifference. Jimmy—little as he had heard of this archaic speech—understood the order. It was a bored, indifferent direction that the girl be given to the monsters and the two men killed. Their captor reached behind his shield. The Gorgon's head came out again.

V.

JIMMY'S AUTOMATIC crashed. The man with the Gorgon's head spun around and dropped. Red blood poured out upon the speckless white pavement. But even before the crash of his target's brazen helmet on the floor, Jimmy was plunging forward, and Blanchard with him.

The brightly clothed men and women seemed utterly frozen. But their immobility was not that of fear or terror. It was that of incredulous amazement. It was the sort of blank astonishment that would overcome a hunter if a rabbit opened fire upon him with a machine gun.

Jimmy had the Gorgon's head. Blanchard was beside him, his automatic ready and menacing.

"Shoot the first one that moves," snarled Jimmy, "while I find how this damned thing works!"

He was fumbling with the golden horror in his hand. The snaky locks of hair formed a handle, but that was all. It was hard to imagine the thing as a weapon, because men of the earth's surface make all tools and instruments with a strict practicality. There is no play of fancy in the construction of technical devices. Surface men use rubber and steel and glass and metals without ornaments. These folk had turned a paralyzing-ray projector into a work of art.

A tall man, well over six feet, stood up with a glowing robe draping itself magnificently about him. Pure wrath, untainted by fear or any other emotion, gave him an aspect of terrible menace. His voice boomed out—and was cut short by the crackling of Blanchard's gun. The girl cried out triumphantly. Jimmy, fumbling desperately with the sculptured thing in his hand, caught her meaning. She was crying to the gods that their day was done, their rule ended, because the deliverers of the Theophori had come.

Then one of the snaky locks of the Gorgon's head shifted beneath Jimmy's finger. He felt, rather than knew, that the sculptured eyes had

flashed. The mob of cold-eyed human beings froze where they stood; became utterly rigid in the fearsome stiffness of catalepsy.

A fat man, purple-faced from rage and the wine that poured from an upset pitcher at his feet, was caught in the act of a vast hiccup. A woman, beautiful in a fashion purely physical, was frozen in the act of reaching to a tiny thing at her waist that seemed no more deadly than a box for cosmetics. A man with a face like Apollo, frowning, had half drawn his sword—and there was the hissing of flame from its scabbard, and the brazen sheath smoked suddenly, and glowed, and melted.

In every conceivable attitude, the brightly colored people were still.

They had been feasting languidly. Great bowls of fruit and confections were interspersed with flagons of fragrant, sparkling drink. But they were motionless now.

But there came a beastly scrabbling and conglomeration of noises. A horde of things came pouring out upon the terrace on which the rigid gods had feasted. Some of the things were hopping weirdly, and some of them ran on two legs, or four, or six, and some of them writhed forward. But there was none that was not monstrous, not one that was not in some fashion or in some degree human, and none that did not seem to have come from the most hideous of nightmares.

A feathered thing screeched and ran forward on human feet. Something else with innumerable heads, of which one was that of a human idiot, came writhing forward upon the stumps of innumerable legs. And there was the counterpart of that sphinx, with its hypnotic eyes and impassive countenance, that they had killed in the mine.

Jimmy held out the golden Gorgon's head with an almost hysterical feeling that he was impersonating Perseus of ancient legend, and that he was not dressed for the part. The things froze as the Gorgon's eyes flashed. And he looked at them and was sick to his very soul.

"Good God!" he said thickly. "Blanchard, these are the guards of the gods. Let's get out of here!"

But the girl touched his hand, smiling a white-faced little smile. She spoke; carefully, now, because she had come to realize that it was hard for him to understand her. And Jimmy looked deeply into her eyes, and they glowed softly in return, but she fought away all thoughts of anything but the one thing that seemed most important of all possible things to her.

"She wants to get to her people," said Blanchard, "to end the reign of the gods forever."

Jimmy asked a question. He phrased it carefully. The girl nodded and explained, watching to make sure he understood what she was saying.

"These were the monsters," said Jimmy in a purring fury, "and the damned things we killed were monsters, to whom she was thrown. The Theophori—this girl's people—are the descendants of the slaves and children turned over to the gods in ancient days. They are raided for women, now, either for playthings for the gods, or for the monsters. She was turned over for that purpose. The monsters are the guards of the gods and the subjects of the gods, and some of them are doubtless the children of the gods. The chap who had this Gorgon's head was visiting something with a woman's head—but not a woman's body. Blanchard, we've got to wipe this business out!"

"We'll need machine guns," said

Blanchard thickly, "and poison gas, and——"

But there was a sudden hiss and crackle. A thing exploded luridly just past Jimmy's shoulder. A human figure in a bright-colored robe darted through a doorway and out of sight.

"They're coming to!" snarled Blanchard.

Jimmy held up the Gorgon's head again, and shifted the movable snaky lock with a queer feeling of inadequacy. It made no noise and gave no sign that it had operated. Blanchard had his gun ready.

Jimmy moved grimly forward, the other two with him. One of the gods was alive and moving. He would have weapons which they could only guess at, though Jimmy remembered a thunderbolt he had seen flung from the topmost battlement of this same structure. Remembering that, he raced ahead. He heard a clatter as of brazen sandals upon steps before him. He fired a shot or so at the sound. The roar of the weapon would be strange to the fugitive, and by the same token as alarming as the gods' weapons to the surface men. The brazen sandals redoubled their speed, and Jimmy leaped up the stairs three at a time.

As he passed them, he had glimpses of hallways of impossible luxury, of incredible richness, of unparalleled artistry. But the brazen sandals fled ever before him. He followed, and Blanchard and the girl toiled desperately after him. Even Jimmy began to pant for breath before he saw his quarry toiling up a high stairway yet above him, and fired again and heard a thin scream. Then the fugitive dived through a doorway, and seconds later Jimmy was plunging in after him.

He saw monstrous sculptures, and shields, and swords. And he saw a balcony beyond the room, and on it a movement, and dashed there also, and the fugitive was in mid-air, yards away, standing in a strap suspended from a brazen shield which he held over his head.

He was flying, and it seemed somehow that the shield was a repellent of gravity and in some fashion a flying device. Vast as the cavern was, there would be no winds to make complicated controls necessary.

But now the flying man turned about in mid-air. He drew his sword, and flame flashed from it, and draperies beside Jimmy smoked and caught fire luridly. But Jimmy's automatic barked again, and the flying man crumpled and dropped from the strap in which he stood, and the shield flew upward in a sudden insane swoop, and turned over in midflight and dashed itself to fragments against a battlement half a mile away.

"That's that!" said Jimmy with grim satisfaction.

But he glanced downward, and his blood ran cold.

The brightly colored figures of the humanlike gods were stirring. They fled to cover. The monsters, also, writhed, or ran, or hopped out of sight in obedience to orders from a man in a golden robe who ran before them to lead them. And then a tumult began all through the huge golden structure of the acropolis.

VI.

"I THINK," said Jimmy grimly, "that we're probably finished. But we've got the Gorgon's head, anyhow, and we'll fight it out."

Blanchard pointed to the wall. A duplicate of the Gorgon's head hung there. There were several. And there were swords such as Jimmy had seen flash flame at him,

and one of which he had seen melt its own scabbard when its wearer was stricken with cataleptic rigidity with the weapon only half drawn. And there were shields. Jimmy gave a shout of satisfaction.

"We're in the armory!" he roared. "The armory of the gods!"

He thrust a Gorgon's head upon Blanchard and upon the girl, explaining swiftly how they worked. Upon each of them there was a movable lock of the snaky hair. He eyed the shields hungrily.

"Guard the entrances with the heads," he commanded, "while I look at these shields. They've got controls, somewhere!"

He dragged a shield from its peg and inspected the back in desperate haste. Again the luxuriant decoration, the overelaborate ornamentation. With amazing cleverness, the controls were made to seem a part of the relief-design only. But presently he had found them. He experimented recklessly, then unslung a coiled strap of hide, stood in it, and felt himself lift from the floor.

"We can fly, now!" he panted joyously. "How's it coming?"

Blanchard's gun roared. A pencil of white-hot flame coming through the door wavered up to the ceiling, loosened a fitted stone, and died away.

"They've got something——" panted Blanchard, and stopped.

Because the world had gone suddenly, utterly dark. Cries came up from below, but they were cries of rage. Then the light came on again, the same flickering light that shone perpetually in this colossal cavern. And Jimmy stared at a fire-blackened stone which had been loosened by a pencil of flame and had dropped from the ceiling upon one of the horrible statues in this room. It was bumping down to the floor, now. Jimmy saw the arm of the smitten statue moving stiffly back into place. The statue was that of a man holding a torch aloft to give him light so that he could look down, smiling horribly, at the sculptured things about his feet.

Something clicked in Jimmy's brain. He began to see the foulness of the folk who formed even their technical machinery with controls shaped into obscenities. And he seized the torch-bearing arm and pulled on it.

Again darkness fell, utter and absolute. And when he released the arm and light sprang again into being, Jimmy cried out in triumph. But Blanchard gasped:

"They've got something that neutralizes the Gorgon's head! I'm having to shoot——"

Jimmy seized a sword from the wall. He flung off its sheath. And instantly, instead of a thrusting point, a pencil of consuming heat leaped from its tip.

"All set!" snapped Jimmy. "These will hold the door for us. It's a heat ray of some sort!"

He put down the sword where its beam of heat would rake the opening. He jerked loose another sword, and another. Half a dozen of the weapons filled the doorway with an unbearable heat.

"Now listen!" panted Jimmy. "We can fly with these shields. I'll show you how. And these gods make the light for this world, and I've found out how to turn it off. We'll send this girl to her people, armed with the Gorgon heads. Because those devils downstairs have heat rays, we'll send her off in darkness. We'll give her a chance to get a long way away, turn on the light again—so that she can land—and take off ourselves in more darkness. Sooner or later, these devils will

have the light going again. Then we can land. But, anyway, we have our flashlights, and we'll arrange to——"

The girl cried out. Something winged and horrible was landing on the balcony. A sword-ray cut it in half. Its shriek brought more cries of rage from below. The room was beginning to fill with the reek of scorched stone and burning draperies.

"Guard the balcony with a sword!" panted Jimmy.

He caught at the girl's shoulder. Pandemonium was rising from below. The outcries of monsters arose, as if they were being herded to an attack from which they shrank. Jimmy showed the girl, with a vast, aching tenderness, just how to operate the shield, and told her fumblingly and painfully just what she was to do. Go to her people. Show them the shield and the Gorgon heads. They would be weapons for the future. He and Blanchard would fight off the raging gods below until she was safe. She must fly fast and far while the darkness held. Then she must alight. He and Blanchard would escape in a second darkness. When the light came on yet again she must make her way to her people very carefully and very cautiously, using the heads for defense.

She interrupted with a question, hopeless tears in her eyes. Jimmy hesitated. Then he spoke, firmly. And suddenly she melted into his arms and kissed him passionately.

Blanchard was gray-faced as she stood on the balcony, the shield held above her head, half a dozen of the sculptured faces of horror caught in her belt. Slender, and young, and beautiful, with the bravest and most wistful of smiles for them, she stood waiting.

Jimmy pulled down the torch of the beastly image which smiled upon horrors at its feet. The world went dark, and she was gone!

There was utter blackness save where the sword-rays poured out the doorway. There the very air glowed blue-white, and the structure of the building itself was crumbling under the heat of the rays. But into that incandescent air, a monster came shrieking.

Its face was a horror itself, blended of a dozen races of creatures. It seemed to explode in the furnacelike heat that poured out of the armory of the gods. And then there was another, and another——

Furred, and feathered, and scaled, with wings, and paws, and fins, and mere shapeless lumps of flesh for limbs, the monsters were driven to destruction from below. They reached the focus of the sword-rays. They died, to an accompaniment of bedlamlike howls and shriekings, and they produced a reek of volatilized flesh that was nauseating, was horrible, was overpowering——

Jimmy released the sculptured torch, and the world outside sprang into light. He saw a tiny glittering point of light, very far away indeed. His heart leaped. As he watched, it slanted downward, hovered, and vanished among the incredible forms of vegetation of this underground world.

"She's safe!" he roared to Blanchard above the hideous uproar of the dying things. "She'll get her people. They'll meet us where we first met her! Get a shield! We'll fasten down the light control and start!"

Blanchard obeyed, and Jimmy pointed out the controls of the flying device and shouted an explanation of their use above the screamings of the burning monsters. He

slung a sword-ray about himself and took a Gorgon's head, which he found fitted neatly into an ingenious clamp in the sculptured back of the shield. He fastened down the torch of the light-controlling figure. Again the only illumination in the world was the flames of the sword-rays.

Jimmy and Blanchard retreated to the balcony outside. It seemed to Jimmy, now, as if the force of the sword-rays was dying out, as if the substances that created them were being exhausted. The monsters were still flinging themselves into the flames. One thing with many heads thrust one long neck into the armory itself. Then a sword-ray burned the neck through. The nearly human head writhed and gasped and flopped crazily about the room at the end of the serpentine neck.

And Jimmy and Blanchard took off together in the blackness. Each holding to an end of a strip of charred hanging, there was no danger of their losing each other in the blackness. And Jimmy had oriented himself before leaping from the balcony's marble balustrade. They flew, and flew, and flew, until there was only deep silence about them, and they began to fear that they would dash into the cavern's roof or rocky wall.

"We'd better stop," said Blanchard in a shaken voice.

"We'll land," said Jimmy.

They settled slowly, together. And suddenly there was light all about them. No more than a quarter mile away they saw the mouth of the cavern from which they had emerged into this monstrous world. The three-headed thing no longer sunned itself in the perpetual shadeless twilight.

"Fly there?" asked Blanchard.

Jimmy nodded—and regretted it bitterly afterward. Because they rose no more than forty or fifty feet and soared toward the tunnel. And then, from the high-walled acropolis beneath the golden light, there came an instantaneous, jagged, flashing flame. Pure lightning streaked past them; a fireball of electric force. It smashed against the farther wall of the cave and exploded luridly. An instant later there was another. The pungent smell of ozone was almost overpowering. The second thunderbolt missed them only by feet.

In blind panic, they darted for the cave mouth. They bolted into the rocky passage, forced to abandon their shields by the need for haste, and outside they heard the terrific impacts of thunderbolt after thunderbolt. It seemed as if electric fluid dripped down the very rocks, as if it would pour into the passage after them.

Racing, Jimmy flashed on his flash. It showed a monstrous head before him. Something was flowing toward him with amazing quietness. He cut at it with the sword-ray. Blanchard joined him. They wiped off its heads, and baked the fore part of its body, and it continued to flow toward them, as if its nervous organization were too low for the hind part of the body to know the fore part was killed. Would it never stop? Never?

"The passage!" gasped Blanchard.

The thing was still flowing forward. In seconds more it would close the way to the upper world—and thunderbolts flamed and crashed behind them. They flung their swords into the thing, and themselves into the side way, and saw the unwinking blue-white glow of the light in the sphinx's cave again before them——

"It'll be days," said Jimmy uneasily, "before the Theophori can come to meet us, and meanwhile the gods will be hunting us. And we can get some bombs and machine guns, and maybe some Greek troops. We'll go up, and come back with reenforcements."

On the farther side of the sphinx's cave, Blanchard set down the Gorgon's head he carried. He fastened the movable snaky lock so that the eyes continued to flash.

"Rear guard," he explained grimly.

They went on. At last they dropped into the drift of the fifth level of the mine. There was only a heap of putrescence where the body of the sphinx had been. It was gruesomely phosphorescent.

"Funny," said Jimmy in an unnatural levity, "that—that thing seems almost chummy compared to some of the rest."

He and Blanchard laughed hysterically. They were uncontrollable when they reached the bottom of the mine shaft, and it was a long time before they could make any one answer them from the surface. But as they were hauled up the thousands of feet to the surface, they calmed, and began to realize what their story would be.

They flashed into the beautiful, blessed sunlight. Whiskered Greek peasant miners stared at them hopefully. A mustachioed Greek officer beamed at them. He smelled prosaically of wine and garlic.

"You found nothing?" he asked placidly. "It is too bad——"

Jimmy and Blanchard stared at each other. In this world of sunlight, and olive groves, and vineyards, of garlic, and sausages, and newspapers, and politicians, there were also insane asylums. And they suddenly realized that they had no evidence. The flying shields they had abandoned as they fled from the lightning bolts below. The swords they had flung desperately into the flowing body of the thing that barred their way. Jimmy had a Gorgon's head, but he was suddenly resolute in his determination not to display it. He would need it when he and Blanchard went down again.

"No," said Jimmy unsteadily, "we didn't find a thing——"

And suddenly the ground shook and rippled beneath their feet. An earth shock. A temblor, of strictly local occurrence, which did not cause any damage or any disturbance on the earth above.

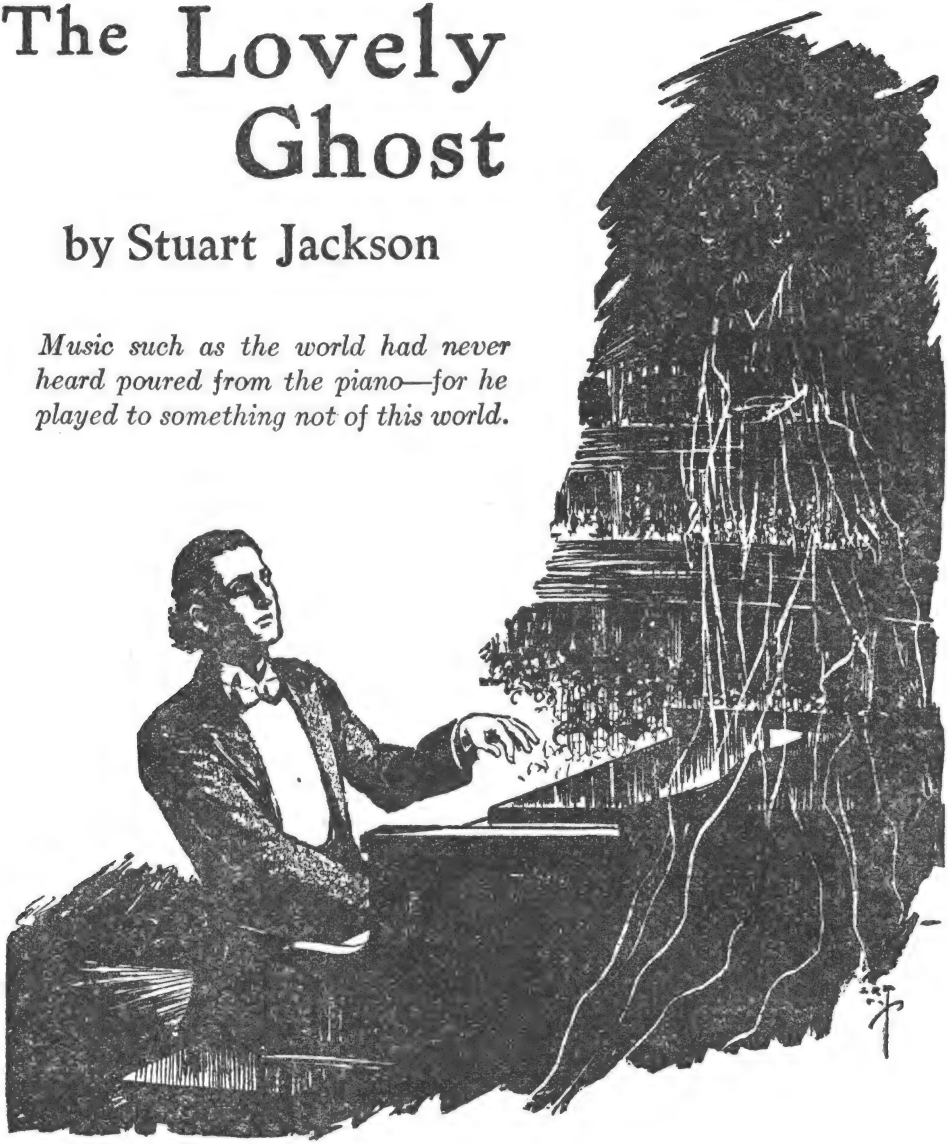
But it was odd in one way. The rock at the bottom of the mine was crushed and broken as if a terrific explosion had taken place far below. Not only the fifth level, but the fourth and third were utterly closed by shifting, implacable rock.

And Jimmy went gray when he realized what had happened. He was thinking of a girl who spoke an archaic, ancient form of the Greek language, and who was beautiful, and who had kissed him trustfully and who—if the gods did not manage to interfere—had expected to meet him shortly just beyond the sphinxes' cave in the dim, perpetual, shadeless twilight of Hades.

The Lovely Ghost

by Stuart Jackson

Music such as the world had never heard poured from the piano—for he played to something not of this world.



I AM TELLING the story of Chalapinski, the pianist, because, it seems, there was a time when he would never have played again, had it not been for a ghost.

To you, who listen enraptured by his playing whenever opportunity presents itself, the thought of music without Chalapinski would seem like an orchestra without instruments. For it has been said of him that he interprets the musical masters better than they wrote their own music.

How you would miss the flourish of that proud, dark head—the sight of those broad shoulders, and the flash of the long white hands that crash out chords to stir the soul!

Women have loved Chalapinski, and not for his music and fame alone. But Chalapinski has loved but one woman. Men, knowing no

better, have hinted at fleshly intrigues—pointing out, as though the fact were any criterion of baser abandonment, that the man has no wife.

But I know Chalapinski better than most men, and better than all women, save one, for it is my privilege to call him friend. Perhaps that is why he told me of the lovely ghost.

You see, somehow or other we had got on to talking about spiritualism, and from there my conversation had degenerated into the so-called mysteries of what are generally known as "ghosts."

"Unpleasant things to have about the house," said I, "even if I believed in them. Horrible apparitions who chill the bones on dark nights in creepy corridors."

"Not every ghost is like that," said Chalapinski quietly.

"Have you ever seen a ghost?" I asked.

Chalapinski looked at me in a peculiar way, and there was the suggestion of a mystic something in his eyes. Then he murmured:

"This one was a very lovely ghost indeed——"

He did not speak again for several minutes, and I smoked one of his Turkish cigarettes in silence—for I could see that he was reviewing a mental procession of the years.

Suddenly he said to me:

"Listen, my friend—and I will tell you the story of a musician who only found fame because of a very lovely ghost."

Now, Chalapinski is a man of imagination, whose conversation carries a literary touch, so I shall give his story as he told it to me.

"That story starts," began Chalapinski, "in the days when nobody asked the musician for his autograph. World tours, packed concerts in every European center, the plaudits of England and America, were but a wild dream of fame. He had yet to be 'discovered,' you see.

"Perhaps it was because he was lonely, and ready to put a romantic halo around the head of some girl who might notice him, that he married young—too young.

"He married a young woman in Budapest. She was a strange creature, as he soon found—and, to his temperament, a dangerous one. She had a sadistic streak in her mental make-up.

"There were terrible scenes, and wild incidents, ugly in the extreme. The climax came when by carelessness she killed the child that had been born to them.

"All this was undermining his music, as you will understand. Music, my friend, is the poetry of the soul; and if that which is ugly takes seed in the soul, then poetry is choked.

"When he realized this thing, after blinding himself to it for some time, the struggling musician—that is the expression, is it not?—knew that he must leave the woman who was his wife.

"She would not divorce him, for his action in leaving her prompted her sadistic nature to prevent him making a happier marriage. She herself found solace in the attentions of a wealthy Greek—but she was careful not to provide any admissable evidence that would give her husband his chance of freedom.

"And so she passes from the story, though her influence had still to be erased from the mind of that struggling musician. He left Budapest, and played his way, in the small cafés and restaurants, from city to city, which, in later years, were to pay high prices to hear his music.

"He was unutterably lonely and

sick at heart. The emotional nature, which may mean so much to a musician, was seared and raw. Cast-iron men, who can pursue their steel-bound ambitions untroubled by any such consideration, might have scorned his sensitiveness. But perhaps you will allow that the man who makes music is necessarily of different caliber from the man who manufactures—let us say—pneumatic drills.

"And it was when that musician was at his most despondent that he met Chrystel.

"You will have heard the platitude that standing behind all really great men is some one woman. And such a woman was very necessary to this man, who, more mature now, was better able to assess that which was worthy in a woman. He had lost sight of beauty, and Chrystel could bring it back. All that was best in him could be brought out by a love that was given without reservation.

"I want you to think of the dawn, for Chrystel was fair as the day; and of eyes that were sea-green, and of clustered curls kissed by the sun. Too lyrical, you think? Ah, my friend, but this love *was* lyrical. Chrystel was very lovely.

"She brought sunshine to him, after shadow—the lilt of laughter, and devotion as deep as the ocean. She brought him passion—and peace. Foreign blood she had inherited fired the former, and yet she was sufficiently Saxon to give him the balance his intense nature needed.

"She loved his music, because it was part of him; and, knowing his need of her, she left her world and came to him. And in case you, my friend, are of a philistine turn of mind—which I doubt—I would tell you that no legal or ecclesiastical ritual could have forged a stronger or more mutual bond. Those two were mated, you understand?

"Their flat was only modestly furnished, but it was home, for Chrystel had made it so. She gave it touches of color, and dainty curtains—and a few flowers.

"She nursed the musician when he was sick, and darned his socks, and sang while she washed up the dishes, and did other things domestic. She sold what little jewelry she had brought with her to help him buy a piano by uneasy installments, breathed words of encouragement when recognition still seemed so elusive, and at night she lay passionately close in his arms, returning caress for caress, and whispering, in a language made for love, *'Je t'aime!—je t'aime avec tous mon coeur!'*

"Do you dispute that their love was lyrical, my friend? With such a woman behind him, what else could he be but inspired?

"And his love of her found its way from his soul to his finger tips, so that there was passion and tenderness, depth and delicacy, grace and grandeur in his playing—for through Chrystel he had learned the loveliness of life.

"The inspiration that was apparent in his playing did not pass unnoticed. It attracted the attention of 'the people who matter.' He began to get engagements for the restaurants of the rich and from more exclusive circles than the cheap, Continental cafés where his music had been lost in the clatter of crockery.

"So the time came when what is known as society bade him hand his hat to the butler, and a very illustrious hostess set the seal of approval on his playing. And it was known among the cognescenti that

it was but a step across the way from the salon of that illustrious hostess to the hall of fame—otherwise, my friend, Monarchy Hall, which, as you know, prides itself on offering the finest music in the world to discriminating audiences paying a high price to hear it.

"Can you imagine their mutual joy when, one magical day, the musician conveyed to Chrystel the news that he was to play in a few weeks' time at the Monarchy Hall? No, I do not think that even you can imagine the full ecstasy of that day.

"A successful début at the Monarchy Hall means so much. Just how much you yourself, whose business it has been to weigh the talents of new 'discoveries' in the balance, will know.

"And Chrystel's first thought was that a potential celebrity should be in a state to give of his best, so that he might duly become celebrated. She suggested a brief holiday by the sea before her musician gave himself up to the arduous rehearsals preparatory to his début.

"So they went away together, and for a whole week Chrystel would not permit him to touch a piano. They just lazed in the sun and laughed in the surf, and wandered in the lanes of the little villages pushed back from the sea at the foot of grape-bloom hills.

"Life was very sweet. So sweet, that fate found them sharing a happiness that made irony envious.

"Happy though that holiday was, they had no regrets when they took the train for home. There seemed so much to look forward to.

"The wheels of the train sang of a triumph to be as they rushed through the night. If the whine of the whistle was like a wail of warning, they did not heed it.

"And it was while they were holding hands so happily that there came an appalling crash. Then the train rocked and slithered to a sickening silence—a silence that was shattered by the sound of ghastly cries, while flames sprang into the hideous night.

"Perhaps you remember that dreadful railway disaster, when a holiday train came into collision with an express? When twenty-seven people were killed outright, and many burned and badly injured?

"Chrystel and the musician—what of them? They had been traveling in a forward compartment. The musician remembers shrieking her name, as the compartment crushed in like a trodden match box around them. He remembers groping blindly for her in a tangle of tortured steel and writhing woodwork, while thick smoke choked his lungs. That is all he remembers—then. He does not remember how helpers got him out from that hell without his limbs being maimed hopelessly.

"But Chrystel—oh! my God!—Chrystel's lovely little body was broken and torn and terribly twisted and crushed——

"She was taken to the cottage hospital of the wayside market town, the outskirts of which had been the scene of the crash. The musician insisted on going along with her, though they told him he was in no condition to do so.

"Some semblance of life still beat in her, but he knew that there was no hope for his beloved. The surgeons told him that. She would linger a few weeks at most, and then she must die.

"For hours the man who loved her sat at her bedside, waiting for her to give him some sign of sensibility. Can you imagine his agony of mind?

He had sat in the sun—and now all was darkness.

"It was two weeks before he felt Chrystel's hand stray weakly into his own. 'Your music——' she murmured faintly.

"'No matter,' he told her, and his voice was broken.

"'But it does matter, dearest—so much,' she whispered. 'It means everything to you—your début at the Monarchy Hall——'

"'Oh! my sweet,' he cried, 'how could I bear the thought of even trying to play while you were lying here like this?'

"'It is what I would wish you to do,' she told him gently. 'You have fought so hard for this chance, and we both have hoped and gone through so much for it. Your triumph will be mine—always. You must be ready to give your best on that great night, and I shall be with you. Oh! my dear—we have been so much to each other that always I shall be with you.'"

CHALAPINSKI paused at this point in his story, and I noticed that the hand with which he swept the raven hair from off his fine brow was shaking slightly. Presently he continued:

"So I—for it will have been obvious that that musician was myself—flung myself into rehearsals in the tortured days that followed. Heaven knows how!—but it was what she wished.

"And at last there came the night of my début at the Monarchy Hall. Strange, my friend, how the hour that one may have anticipated for years may seem so hollow when it comes.

"I was to play at nine thirty. The place was packed. Musical triumph was in my reach. Incredible that the Monarchy Hall had been attained at last! But how bitterly! My thoughts were elsewhere—in a country cottage hospital, where the woman I loved so well fluttered between life and death. The ordeal before me was doubly difficult, as you will presently see.

"Before leaving Chrystel that day, she had asked me not to get in touch with the hospital until my recital was over. 'I will be with you,' she told me again.

"But the suspense was unbearable. Half an hour before I was due to make my début, I put a call through to the hospital.

"'I must know how she is,' I said feverishly.

"And they told me that she was dead."

Chalapinski, most famous of pianists, paused again, and the room in which I talked with him was very silent. Then, his deep voice tremulous in tone, he went on:

"The inward agony of that moment is with me still, though time mutes most minor keys. I was beside myself with grief. My darkness had deepened. I just stood by that telephone while a procession of minutes passed. It was as though a part of me had died with her. To face the ordeal of playing before a sea of staring faces seemed impossible.

"Then it was, when my agony of spirit had touched the depths, that there came to me some strange strength. For I was suddenly aware that Chrystel stood by my side. I was as certain of it as I am of you here now.

"They came to me and told me it was time for me to go and face the audience. Even as they did so, I knew that Chrystel was still with me, that she was telling me to go out to triumph.

"So I went out before that critical

audience, at the critical moment of my life, and sat down before the great grand piano, whose heavy lid had been raised high as though in anticipation of what I might wring from its bosom.

"And I played. Ah, my friend—but how I played that night! I played of life and of the mysticism of a love that knew no death, and of infinite ecstasy, in contrast with deep despair, for Chrystel was there to guide my hands. I heard her telling me that I had learned a life's lesson out of pain, for only out of pain can come creation, and my music that night *was* creative.

"Then I came to the end of it, and rose from my seat. There was a moment's silence; then a crescendo of applause came swelling up to my ears out of that great hall. Yes, applause that told me I had triumphed. But where was the pride I had always imagined would be mine in this moment?

"The plaudits were loud—but they sounded empty to me. I tell you that a part of me had been left, standing stricken, at that telephone half an hour before I played.

"I stood up and half turned to take my bow, with my right hand resting on the inside of that grand piano, above which the massive lid was raised.

"And, even as I was bowing bemusedly to the vast, applauding audience, my right hand suddenly did a strange thing. It was jerked to my side—not of my own volition, but by some curious force outside my control.

"A split second later, and the massive lid of the piano fell with a terrific crash. Had my hand still been resting where it had been a moment before, it would have been smashed to pulp—and I would never have played again."

Once more Chalapinski paused; and I—my trade has made me skeptical—said:

"Possibly a contraction of the muscles of the arm after an intensive spell of playing."

"I tell you," came the instant reply, "that the lovely ghost of Chrystel was with me that night."

"And did you see her?" I put in.

"I know she was there," said Chalapinski.

"But have you ever *seen* a ghost?" I persisted. "And, as for the piano incident—surely, since you say you were only half turned to the audience, you saw for yourself that the lid was falling?"

Then it was that Chalapinski gave me his dénouement.

"I have never seen a ghost, my friend. Certainly not the ghost of Chrystel. How could I? I said that the railway disaster had not maimed my limbs—but shock had temporarily taken its toll on me.

"No, I could not *see* the ghost of Chrystel. You see, I was—*blind.*"

Prisms of SPACE

by Robert H. LEITFRIED

THE LONG TREK across three quarters of the globe ended at lower Manhattan. As Bruce Lanyard felt himself caught up in the maelstrom of city din, he wished he was back in the Valley of the Gods, surrounded by the majestic Himalayas. Tibet was never more real to him than at this moment.

Brown, lean, hardened by scorching suns and blasting winters, Lanyard felt suddenly out of place in the melting pot of civilization. Why had he come back?

His fingers felt for the letter that had followed him for nearly a year before it was opened by his restive fingers. And having opened it, he had abandoned everything. By pack

train, by camel, by endless miles of long marches, he had set his face toward civilization, lost in the wonder of a woman's words that bade him come to her.

He stood after a few minutes just inside the portières of Doctor Asa Cadmore's library, half expectant, half fearful at the expected shock of seeing her face again.

The doctor-inventor raised his eyes as the adventurer entered. Weary eyes they were, eyes that were saddened by a great sorrow. They brightened at sight of the lean figure.

"Bruce!" A thin cry of pleasure. The old man was on his unsteady feet, arms outstretched.

Lanyard clasped both of the chemical-stained hands. "It's good to see you again, doctor!" His eyes strayed toward an adjoining room. Where was Ishtar? Ishtar, whose words had called him from the interior of Asia. Ishtar, whose letter had been over a year in reaching him. His eyes betrayed the question to the girl's father.

Cadmore motioned him to a chair. "Sit down, Bruce. There is much to tell you. And I'm afraid it isn't going to be pleasant."

Lanyard sat down. His eyes, set beneath the arch of his forehead, stared questioningly into those of the older man.

"Ishtar," intoned the doctor-inventor with a faint catch to his voice, "is no longer with me."

"Dead?" breathed Lanyard.

"No, not dead. Ishtar is alive. Very much alive, but—but not on this old Earth of ours, Bruce. She's on a far planet out into space."

Renewed fear clutched at the heart of Bruce Lanyard. Only faintly did his mind sense the startling import of Asa Cadmore's words. He said slowly:

"Tell me all about it. I'm—I'm in the dark."

"Two years ago," began the doctor-inventor, "I stumbled quite by accident on a method of reducing solid substances into light waves. Naturally, I became excited and a little fearful. I told nobody except Ishtar. Together we worked. I developed new prisms. Everything went beyond my wildest hopes."

He paused. "It was then that Ishtar told me that she had written you. We both wanted you with us for the first great experiment. No word from you. I became nervous. It was essential to try the new prisms. I had my own way in the matter. Ishtar, of her own free will, promised to be the subject for the experiment."

A grayish paleness stole over the adventurer's face as he listened to the older man.

"I projected her body out into the wasteland of star space," announced the inventor, "straight into the advanced civilization of a far planet. And she lived during her trip through the elements, Bruce. Ishtar is there now, waiting for me to bring her back."

"And you can't?" Lanyard's eyes widened with fear. "You can't bring her back, doctor?"

"I'll—I'll need your help."

"I'll do anything you say."

"I knew you would. Now, listen. When my rays carried Ishtar to this far planet, I intended to bring her back to Earth at once. But Bruce, the people on this planet have a ray—a ray of impenetrable blackness. They turned it on. It struck the rays from my own machine. My rays couldn't pierce it. The black beam acted as a powerful reflector. My own rays were turned back on the prisms. And the heat generated cracked them."

"Then the same thing is likely to happen again?"

"Yes."

"And if it does?"

"I have two prisms in reserve. It's taken over a year to have them made. And if anything happens this time ——" He shook his head slowly.

"We'll cross that bridge when we get to it!" snapped Lanyard.

Cadmore seemed to brighten. "Good, my boy! But come. I'll show you the machine at once."

Lanyard, vaguely uneasy, followed the doctor-inventor to the third floor of the house.

The door leading into the laboratory opened. Bruce looked around. Half-finished machines lined the room on all sides. But Bruce had no interest in them. His eyes were fastened on a glittering structure of highly polished metal.

ASA CADMORE pointed to his machine with some pride. "There it is, Bruce—the space conqueror."

Lanyard stepped closer. "How does it work?"

"Vibration of matter—disintegration. What I have done is to reduce matter into light waves, and project them outward into space through special prisms."

Lanyard eyed the machine curiously. There were two prisms, aquamarine in tint, each suspended longitudinally between two posts of some highly polished metal. Their faces were roughly three feet in length and half that in width. An insulated platform was erected beyond them, so that a person standing upon it would be directly in the path of the ray passing through the prisms.

Beside the platform stood a black cabinet, similar to a transformer. High-tension wires coiled from the cabinet to a heavy switch set against the wall.

"Come over to the control table, Bruce."

Lanyard crossed to where the older man stood.

"This," announced Cadmore, "is the heart of the machine. I not only control the rays from here, but I also see the rays after they have passed through the prisms."

The inventor turned back the cloth covering the table. Directly in its center rested a square of metal screen. Farther back on the table were twelve vacuum tubes of unfamiliar design. To the left was a large dial almost the size of a dinner plate, with a Vernier set in its center. Close to it were three switches with colored handles.

A final inspection of terminals, and the doctor-inventor closed the master switch. Came a sputtering crack, and an arc light glowed whitely against the prisms. On the control table the vacuum tubes glowed dully, and the metal screen glowed with the clearness of a polished mirror.

Gradually this gave way to a faint mistiness. Lanyard gasped. Squarely in its center floated a turbulent mass of clouds that cleared up almost at once. Presently a dark speck shot into his field of vision, growing in size with each fractional part of a second. It seemed to rush toward the screen with the speed of a meteor.

"Our common, everyday Moon," observed Cadmore. "We'll be within a few miles of it in a very short time."

The dark speck expanded as it flowed into the metal screen. Finally it covered the screen altogether in a twisting mass that became steadily brighter. Soon mountains and valleys loomed up, pitted with deep craters. And when it seemed that the Moon itself would crash into

the screen, Cadmore pulled back on a lever controlling the angle of the prisms.

The light beam from the prisms slanted into space. A second dark speck mirrored itself in the screen. Closer it came with incredible swiftness, until its mass covered the reflecting screen. The outlines of mountains and hills expanded with such swiftness that Lanyard became dizzy from watching.

"This is the planet," announced Cadmore, studying the reflection intently, "but we're on the wrong side of it. We must curve the rays to the other side."

"But we're seeing this planet through the medium of strong prisms," objected Lanyard. "I'm not a scientist, but I do know that, in spite of their strength, your prisms cannot reveal what lies beyond the horizon."

Doctor Cadmore smiled tolerantly. "Did you ever hear of triple refraction?"

Lanyard shook his head.

"Well, it's the inherent quality of my prisms to deflect a ray of light in an arc of a hundred and eighty degrees, which makes it possible for the rays of this machine to curve around the horizon. Watch!"

He pulled a lever. Somewhere beneath a table a motor hummed. The farthest prism tilted, ever so slightly. But it was enough. As Lanyard's eyes returned to the metal screen, he saw the wild, mountainous regions of the planet drop downward, and in their place appear roads, buildings and civilization. A city flowed into the screen, flashing with color that defied description. Above it, hovering like silver insects, were strange ships of the air, unlike any ever seen on Earth—airships without wings, bullet-shaped in design.

"But we want the palace," said the inventor. "It should be over to the right. There it is! See those four minarets covered with what looks like pure gold? A little more to the right. A twist on the prism control. Ah! Here's an open space, very likely the place where we'll find Ishtar, if she's still alive."

Lanyard stared in mute wonder. On the screen showed a wide expanse of luxuriant courtyard. The foliage seemed an unnatural color.

"Why is it," he asked, "that Nature has departed from green in its grass and trees?"

"Nature is the same all over, Bruce. It's the fault of the prisms."

He turned to the control table and continued: "Observe carefully, Bruce. These two switches with the colored handles control the vacuum tubes on the control table. They must be kept switched on at all times during the experiment. This end one controls the light-filter cells housed underneath the table."

"Hold on a minute, doctor," interrupted Lanyard. "I haven't the faintest conception of what this machine can or cannot do."

"I'll explain all that's necessary, Bruce. Just do as I direct."

"Of course."

"Now, when I step onto the platform for the outward projection through space, I want——"

"Wait a second," cut in Lanyard. "This is not clear at all. If anyone steps out on that platform, I'm going to be the one."

"But listen, Bruce——"

Lanyard shrugged. "I've made up my mind. You're going to project my body to the planet. Now explain just what takes place, doctor, so I'll be more or less prepared."

Doctor Cadmore placed his fingers on a large dial close to the metal screen. "This dial," he began, "is the controlling force of the Tung-

sten wires strung above the platform. Below them is an electromagnetic field, perhaps four feet square. You will notice that the top of the platform is covered with quartz crystal. It is the only substance I have found that will not respond to the disintegrating influence of the vibrating Tungsten wires. Following the change of matter into light waves, the beam from the arc passes through my special lenses. And the light in turn is flashed out into space."

"Hm-m-m!" grunted Lanyard. "Well, is there any reason why we shouldn't make the attempt to locate Ishtar now?"

Doctor Cadmore wiped his damp forehead. "None that I know of. I would have preferred to make the dangerous trip myself, but as you say, perhaps it is better that I remain at the controls."

Lanyard tried to keep his voice steady. He was used to danger—but being transported bodily to an unknown planet was beyond his imagination. He fought down fear and spoke calmly. "I'm ready now."

Cadmore nodded. "I'll do everything I can to protect you, Bruce. Wherever you go, your body will show plainly on the metal screen. It may take time, but I'll do my best to keep you in sight with the rays. Keep out of buildings as much as possible. And now, good luck."

After a fervent handshake, the adventurer stepped on the crystal platform midway between the metal uprights holding the prisms. Calmly he waited.

"Ready?" asked the inventor.

"Ready."

BLUE SPARKS jumped from the master switch as contact was made. Almost at once Lanyard felt a surge of cold air envelope his body. From somewhere in the laboratory came a strange sound like rushing winds. He felt the crystal platform vibrate beneath his feet. To his ears came a steady humming, mounting higher and higher in pitch. The Tungsten wires above his head sang a wild, continuous note that sirened far above the rushing roar of the wind.

Cadmore turned to the instrument table, pressed two knobs and released two others. The vibration rate of the Tungsten wires increased. Higher and higher mounted the humming paean of their throbbing.

A cloudy mist gathered before Lanyard's eyes. His body seemed enshrouded in fog. He attempted to turn his head, but it remained immovable. He struggled to twist his eyes. They too were held fast by the invisible power emanating from the electrical forces pouring through his body.

Things began to blur. Slowly the glittering posts supporting the prism in front of him took on the same mistlike quality as the body of Doctor Cadmore. Only one thing remained constant in his line of vision—a beam of greenish light that seemed to glow around the center of the prism.

Quite suddenly the world turned black. He felt himself jerked from the platform and hurled through space. He had a vivid sensation of falling, as one does in a dream. Alternately he shivered with cold and baked in unbearable heat. Yet all the time he felt space fleeing before him.

A feeling of exhilaration caused his body to tingle strangely, as though some enlivening force had taken possession of him. He felt uplifted and strong. Space around him glowed with flashing, iridescent lights.

With startling abruptness, his flight through space ended. He felt himself being pressed against an invisible barrier and held there. The iridescent lights paled. Shadows danced before his eyes. A lethargy crept over him. He began to feel heavy. The shadows darkened and became a wall of stone against which his body pressed.

Out of thin air his body began to materialize. His mind groped for several minutes for an explanation of the phenomenon. Then he realized that the matter that composed his body was undergoing a rapid change from light waves to solid substance. The rays from Cadmore's twin prisms had come to rest against a solid stone wall. He was totally off the Earth, and materializing in his worldly body on a strange planet.

He saw the shadowy outlines of his hands and feet appear out of thin air. Abruptly gravity acted upon his body, and he dropped from the face of the wall to the ground.

For several minutes following his arrival on the planet, the vibratory rate of the Tungsten wires throbbed in the air around him. Suddenly this sound ceased, as if someone had thrown the switch from the dynamo controlling it.

Had Lanyard seen the agonized look that flowed across Doctor Cadmore's face on the instant the metal screen went blank from the failure of the prisms, he might have had grave cause for alarm.

As it was he remained unaware of the catastrophe. The black ray, wherever it came from, had shot into the path of the light streaming out from the prisms, and before Cadmore could lift a hand, the prism had cracked from the intense heat generated from the reflection of its own rays. Until that prism could be replaced, the inventor was helpless to aid either his daughter or the man he had projected into space to find her.

LANYARD, of course, knew nothing of all this. His thoughts at that precise moment were centered wholly on two beings standing beside him, and regarding him with puzzled eyes.

Tall men they were, well over six feet, with skins of coppery bronze. Green bands of metal encircled their foreheads, keeping long hair away from their faces. And they were beardless. They wore a sort of a leather doublet studded with metal, and carried knives.

Conscious of their close scrutiny, Lanyard smiled and attempted to be friendly. But the strange beings remained stonily indifferent. One of them pointed toward a stone structure some distance away and spoke unintelligible words as he started toward it.

Understanding their wishes, Lanyard followed behind them. The leader of the two entered a door where a ramp slanted beneath a building. Through cavernous passages they made their way in utter silence.

They came after a time to a metal-studded door, over which burned a bluish light. A guttural word from one of them, and it opened. Lanyard found himself in a guard room. A number of men similar to his guides lounged upon benches. They jumped to their feet at sight of him. A blond-haired giant strode forward.

"Zawhol, tsa!"

Lanyard shook his head. He didn't understand.

They talked among themselves, evidently undecided as to what to do with this strange being who had

appeared on their planet. After much jabbering, one of the men was dispatched for some one more learned than the rest.

He returned after a considerable time, and with him came a white-haired patriarch in a long, flowing robe. He too examined Lanyard's clothing and muttered meaningless phrases. He seemed pleased. A holy, reverential light illuminated his bronzed face. His body quivered with eagerness. He touched Lanyard lightly on the arm and motioned him to follow.

"They're friendly, at any rate," thought Lanyard, as he kept pace with the elderly man.

They left the passage after a time and crossed a bridge over a stream of muddy water. The place was heavily guarded, but the guards were always respectful of the elderly being.

Upon entering another building, Lanyard became instantly aware of a different class of people. These were better dressed. They were clothed in what looked like silk and linen garments gathered at one shoulder and terminating at the knees. A few of them were ornamented with bracelets of beaten gold. And all wore sandals. Probably these were the aristocrats.

They reached the far end of the room. A pungent odor filled the air. Lanyard sniffed questioningly. Iodoform or a similar compound, he thought. An attendant met them here and guided them through an arched doorway.

The sight that met Bruce Lanyard's eyes caused his blood to run cold. Under the glare of white lights he saw a line of operating tables. Planet beings were strapped to them, each undergoing some form of vivisection. While he hesitated at the doorway, strong arms encircled his body and strapped him to a vacant table.

The white-haired patriarch spoke to one of the attendants. A table with antiseptics and surgical instruments was wheeled close. Several of the planet surgeons turned their cases over to assistants and gathered around the table to which Bruce was strapped.

A second table was wheeled from an adjoining room. By twisting his neck, Lanyard could see the head and shoulders of a very old man. A cloth of gold covered the lower part of his body.

What did they mean to do?

Carefully the planet surgeons began to measure, with instruments that closely resembled calipers, the necks and shoulders of both Lanyard and the old man on the adjoining table. Presently the patriarch conveyed by sign language the horrible operation.

The old man was their ruler. His body was close to death. Only by surgery could they give him a new body. They would accomplish it by transferring the body of this white, godlike creature to the head of their king!

LANYARD TRIED to protest. Frantically he struggled against the straps that held him to the operating table. The horrible purpose of their surgery caused a cold sweat all over his body.

Something cracked overhead. A stream of light blazed down from the ceiling. One of the planet surgeons marked the spot on his neck where the head was to be separated from the trunk.

A similar preparation was taking place at the adjoining table. Lanyard watched, in spite of the horror in his heart, the flashing strokes of a glowing scalpel—saw deft fingers

attach suctionlike ends of flexible tubing to what appeared to be a heart machine which drained all blood from the parts exposed by decapitation.

The planet surgeons left the other operating table and approached the one whereon lay the Earth man. And as Lanyard sucked in a strangled breath, the surgeon with the glowing scalpel was suddenly bending over him.

Lanyard closed his eyes. Guttural voices rasped his ears. Something cold and clammy touched his throat. His eyes snapped open. It was then that he saw the suctionlike ends of the tubes. They were being made ready to fasten upon his arteries like so many leaches.

The tortured man could feel the planet surgeon's breath against his face. The glowing scalpel edged closer. Fingers slid over the exposed throat. And while the Earth man fought against a growing insanity, through the walls of the room pulsed a humming sound——louder and still louder.

A cloudy mist gathered before Lanyard's eyes. The figure of the planet surgeon became enveloped in cloudy vapor. The humming mounted through the lower register of sound, and climbed in pitch till the human ear could no longer hear it.

The walls of the room became tinged with greenish light. Lanyard felt his body vibrate as it had in Cadmore's laboratory. As before, the world went suddenly black. He was jerked from the table, room and all.

Again the queer sensation of being hurled through an eternity of space!

Then the light began to pale. Shadowy images clouded his vision. Bright posts of metal glinted through the fog. His body grew heavy. And with heaviness came an extreme lassitude of his entire being.

The worried face of Cadmore swam before his eyes. He tried to smile, felt the blood drain from his head, and collapsed weakly upon the crystal platform.

SOMETHING STUNG his throat. He opened his eyes. The doctor was forcing brandy down his throat. The warm stimulant restored his numbed senses.

"You got me just in time, doctor!"

"Feeling better?"

Lanyard sat up, ashamed of his weakness. "I'm all right. A close call. Wasn't pleasant. What happened to the machine?"

"One of the prisms cracked. The dark ray. They flashed it on. However, I installed one of the two reserve prisms in time."

"How did you know where I was?"

"I didn't know. Not being able to trace you in the open, I turned the rays on all the buildings within a radius of a mile from where you landed."

"Had you not reached me when you did, doctor, my body at this moment might have been joined to the head of an old, old man, and his body would have replaced mine. An unpleasant prospect. I think I aged ten years in ten minutes."

"Impossible!" breathed Cadmore. "Why, you'd bleed to death——"

Lanyard shook his head. "No, doctor. I saw them decapitate the head of another man. They attached a mechanical heart that took care of every drop of blood. No, those surgeons knew what they were doing."

"Shall we abandon the project for to-day, Bruce? You look worn out."

For reply, the adventurer once

more stepped onto the crystal platform. "I'm ready," he announced. "Let's go. But set me down in a different spot this time."

Once more rushing winds poured from the black boxes. The platform began to vibrate. Slowly the interior of the laboratory faded away. Then the black void of space again. The mists lifted.

In one breath-taking moment, Lanyard found his body materializing a second time close to one of the main highways of travel on the far planet.

And back in the laboratory on Earth, Doctor Cadmore stared with distended eyes at a narrow band of blackness arching across the screen. With a sudden twist of the dials, he shifted the angle of the rays so as to avoid it. The black ray arched back again. Once more Cadmore avoided it. In sudden dismay, he noted that his own rays were no longer on the spot where he had left Lanyard.

Sweat beaded the inventor's forehead. At any moment the two rays might come into collision again. How could he avoid it and yet keep Lanyard in sight?

He wiped his moistened forehead and tried to think of a method to counteract the menace of the dark ray from the planet laboratory. There was but one prism left in reserve. If it should break——

He half rose to his feet, and as he did so the mysterious ray of blackness again arched darkly across the screen, reflected backward the light coming from the prisms. In a fiery discharge of flame, it erupted around the edges of both prisms.

Came a brittle snap, a puff, and the farthest prism disintegrated into a fine white powder. Asa Cadmore leaped to his feet, snapped off the master switch and surveyed the damage.

One of the prisms was still intact. The broken one could be replaced. But if that went—— Doctor Asa Cadmore dared think no further.

"There's only one left," he murmured. "But I've got to risk it."

BUT IF Asa Cadmore had a problem to overcome, so did Bruce Lanyard. He stood now beside a wide road on the outskirts of a city, wondering just what to do next.

Obviously the thing to do was to darken his skin with some kind of a stain and to find clothes like those worn by the planet people. But where could he go to search for Ishtar? How could he find her?

His eyes followed the road in the far distance. And as he looked, his ears detected a throbbing overhead. He flung his body into the vegetation beside the road and stared upward at the metal sheen of a ship of the air, one of those he had first seen in the metal screen.

Its body was cigar-shaped, not unlike the bag of a dirigible. It carried nothing on the outside except horizontal fins that evidently took the place of rudder and ailerons. And directly through the center, from nose to tail, ran a circular opening. Just what power kept the machine in the air, Lanyard couldn't determine. It was too small for gas or hydrogen, and it lacked the necessary wings for a plane.

Presently a square of metal like a shutter slid away from the machine's side. Eyes peered out. Lanyard couldn't see them, but he knew beyond a shadow of doubt that the men within the machine had seen him and were watching him.

Lower and lower it settled, sweeping in circular spirals.

The adventurer looked frantically around for a way of escape. He leaped to his feet and darted across

a field. Behind him throbbed the ship of the air, until it hovered directly over him.

Something swished overhead. Over his head and shoulders dropped a net, jerking him from the ground.

He felt himself hauled upward. The ground dropped away with the speed of a rocket. Through a door in the bottom of the metal ship jerked the net. Strong hands seized him and hustled him to a higher landing.

Presently he found himself in a narrow pit facing another of the bronze race. This man was evidently some one of importance. His robes were fastened with clasps of pure gold. Around his forehead and holding his long hair in place ran a narrow band of the same precious metal.

The men who had captured Lanyard released their hold and stood obediently behind him.

"Igwar!" pronounced the leader, extending both hands.

Lanyard thought rapidly. Was it a greeting? And if so, was it meant in friendliness?

"Igwar," he answered.

The leader smiled. A stream of foreign words escaped his lips. He gesticulated wildly, pointing at the ceiling above him.

"Igwar?"

Lanyard also smiled. He knew they recognized him as being from another planet. Pointing toward the same spot as had the leader, he spoke a single word.

"Ishtar!"

The effect was magical. Everybody in the little room in the strange ship broke into some manner of speech. The leader silenced them with an upraised hand. He turned upon the Earth man.

"Ishtar," he spoke, pointing at Lanyard.

The adventurer nodded, at the same time pointing at himself. "Lanyard."

The leader evidently was still puzzled. He spoke sharply. His men immediately left the cabin for some other part of the ship.

Within a few seconds, the machine was turning around. The leader beckoned Lanyard within the control room. A push of a button, and two metal plates slid noiselessly aside. Before his eyes opened a wide vision of straight roads.

Presently they hovered over an immense building that looked vaguely familiar. Lanyard recognized it as the one where he had nearly lost his head. He pointed below and shook his head violently.

"Ishtar. I want to see Ishtar."

The planet being hesitated. He looked searchingly upon this strange white man. Lanyard could see doubt and a trace of suspicion in his face. Evidently he couldn't quite make up his mind whether this man was a friend of Ishtar's or not. For long moments he studied the Earth man's face, then, as if what he saw pleased him, spoke a few words to the men controlling the ship.

Abruptly the machine rose high into the air and winged toward a distant mountain peak. For what seemed an hour they flew before reaching it. At the topmost part of the mountain appeared a vast level plateau, crowned with a single stone building.

Lanyard heard sharp words of command, and immediately the ship spiraled downward. It came to rest as gracefully as a bird. And hardly had it landed when the ground beneath it began to lower, and the mysterious ship settled into subterranean blackness underground.

Lanyard found himself beside the leader as a trap door in the bottom

of the ship opened. He clambered to the ground. The place was now ablaze with lights, revealing a long tunnel.

After many minutes of walking, the planet beings paused outside a massive door and knocked. Two richly dressed guards opened it from the far side. One of them produced a sash and bound it against Lanyard's eyes. He was aware of being led through innumerable passageways until all sense of direction was confused.

PRESENTLY he felt something soft underfoot, like a rug. The guards halted and removed the sash. The barbaric splendor of a high-ceilinged room filled him with awe. Cloths of purple and gold hung in draped festoons at the far end. And directly beneath he saw a throne upon which reclined a beautiful girl, familiar yet unfamiliar. His gaze clung to her.

"Ishtar," breathed Lanyard softly.

Came the cool, level tones of the girl, speaking in a strange tongue. The guards pointed to the leader from the metal ship. He in turn dropped to one knee and murmured a single word: *"Igwar."*

Slowly the eyes of the beautiful girl dropped until they rested on the man who had come from the place they called "Igwar."

"Igwar," she repeated dully. "An Earth man." But still no sign of recognition lighted her eyes.

Lanyard felt sudden pain. Frustrated love of many years welled up in his heart in pulsing torment. "Ishtar!" he called. "Don't you know me? It's Bruce. I've come to take you away."

"Is this the one," she asked, speaking in the language used on the planet, "that the great Jadrow seeks?"

"The same," replied the planet being.

"You have sworn allegiance to me, Grom," said the girl in a softer voice. "Jadrow must never know that you have brought him to me. I have reasons."

"It is written," shrugged Grom, "that a white male god will one day journey to our planet for sacrifice. When you came, we revered and honored you. We looked upon you as a forerunner of the white male that was being sent. No, Princess Ishtar. Much as I adore you, I cannot have our holy books profaned by shielding the male god from his destiny upon our planet."

Ishtar inclined her head graciously. "I would be with the white god alone, Grom. Clear the throne room until such time as I have finished speaking with him."

Grom bowed low, and with the guards left the room. Almost instantly Ishtar's regal bearing vanished. She became again the tender, sweet-faced girl whom Lanyard cherished in memory. Her arms were outstretched, and her eyes filled with longing. "Bruce!"

Lanyard crossed the throne room at a bound and gathered her into his arms. "Ishtar," he murmured, kissing her lips and pressing her slender body against his own.

"Tell me, Bruce," she said at last, "how you happen to be on this planet. Time is precious. And Grom may be communicating with the great Jadrow."

Lanyard told her everything as quickly as he could. "Even now," he concluded, "your father is probably searching with the space rays for our location on this planet. We should be outside in the open."

Ishtar clung to him like a frightened child. "We must be careful, Bruce. I'm afraid of Jadrow. All

these months he's watched me like a hawk. My strength has been with the people. They have looked upon me as a goddess. But I can't stand it any longer. If anything should separate us, Bruce——"

"Don't worry, dear. Everything is arranged. But we've got to get out of here and on some high elevation. Is there any other way except by the passage?"

"Yes, but it's dangerous."

"Anything we do will be dangerous—— Wait a moment. Can we fasten the door leading to the passage?"

Ishtar slipped from his arms and cautiously shot two heavy bolts on the inside of the door. "Come," she whispered.

Together they passed through the curtains in back of the throne. A sliding panel opened noiselessly, leading into a dark passage. But Ishtar seemed to know the way. She held tightly to Lanyard's hand, and they moved slowly through the darkness.

After anxious moments they came to a flight of stone steps leading upward. They had gone but a short distance when the faint drone of vibrating wires broke in on their ears.

"The space rays from your father's machine," whispered Lanyard. "If we can get above ground—— They've stopped!"

"You don't suppose anything's happened?"

Vague shadows of doubt dulled Lanyard's hopes. He brushed them aside. "No. Nothing's happened. I'm sure of it."

But in his heart he wasn't so sure. He couldn't forget that first broken prism.

An eerie stillness was in the cavern. Slowly they toiled upward. A shaft of light appeared in front of them at a turn in the stairs. Full daylight showed ahead. Their courage returned.

Ishtar pointed to a narrow trail skirting the side of the plateau. "This runs to the top. It's used by the priests on their way to the Temple of Orne."

For long minutes they toiled up the grade, stopping frequently to listen for any footsteps behind them.

The sudden tolling of bells broke the silence. The clamor increased until it beat like a storm against the slanting walls of plateau.

Ishtar gripped Lanyard's arm. Her face was white. She spoke in a sobbing whisper.

"It's come, Bruce. Those bells never ring except during a national catastrophe such as the death of our ruler."

Lanyard suddenly saw himself back again in the operating room—saw the suctionlike tentacles reaching for his heart fluid, the glowing scalpel, the aged ruler of the planet with his head decapitated.

The operation had failed. Death had resulted.

He felt his heart constrict at his own nearness to death. "What will happen now?" he asked.

"An overthrow of the planet's government. Jadrow, the ursurper, will try to seize the throne. He's our leading scientist. His lust for power is insatiable. Since the people look upon you as a white god, he will seek to destroy you."

Lanyard glanced back over the way they had come. "Is there any way of getting hold of one of their airships?"

The girl shook her head. "Grom might have aided us. But he's a loyalist to the one in power. If Jadrow wins, Grom will be our enemy."

In the silence that followed they stumbled onward along the narrow ledge leading upward to the top of

the plateau. Off to their left towered a massive building crowned with a metal dome.

Ishtar saw Bruce staring at it. "The Temple of Orne," she said. "Sanctuary for priests and scientists. We mustn't let the guards see us, or the word will go out."

Lanyard grasped the girl by both shoulders and pulled her behind the jutting edge of a near by boulder. But his action came seconds too late. They had been seen.

A squad of tall soldiers debouched from a hidden path leading to the Temple of Orne. Their attitude was menacing.

"Run!" breathed Lanyard. "We must get to the top!"

Upward they raced, rounded a curve and came out on a level stretch of ground. And there a single man awaited their coming. A man with a gorillalike body and cruel, green eyes. He held a gleaming metal tube in his right hand. He was sinister.

The fugitives came to a sudden stop. Ishtar raised a hand to her mouth to choke back the word "Jadrow!"

Lanyard felt his breath snag in the back of his throat.

JADROW LURCHED toward them. Guttural sounds flowed from his mouth. They were directed at Ishtar, but Jadrow's green eyes were fastened on the Earth man with a cold, malevolent stare.

"He means to kill you!" cried the girl.

Even as Lanyard lunged forward to grapple with the man, the metal tube slanted toward him.

A crackling, bluish spark leaped outward. Lanyard felt a sudden stinging blow against his body. Confusion overpowered him. The cords and muscles of his body became so taut that they ached. In mid-stride he stopped, stricken, immovable.

Unable to struggle, he was lifted from his feet and carried away. Out of the corners of his eyes he could see that Ishtar had suffered a like fate. He struggled with all the power of his mind to overcome the paralyzing numbness of his muscles.

Hopeless.

But though the physical part of his body was powerless, he still had all his senses. Was this the end of his quest? Had Cadmore's machine been rendered useless? Had the last lens been broken?

He found himself being carried into the temple. Instead of the usual altars and images set up for strange gods, he saw gleaming metal and sparkling glass.

The temple was a mammoth laboratory.

Faces stared at him as he was slowly carried up an incline toward the dome of the temple. But they were averted when Jadrow appeared.

They reached the top of the incline. Overhead arched the metal dome. Jadrow's voice could be heard barking strange orders. The dome folded back, revealing a canopy of sky.

It was then that the adventurer saw for the first time a machine strangely familiar to that of Doctor Cadmore's. The prisms were different, but the metal posts sustaining them seemed much the same.

An old man approached, evidently a priest, with a vial of colorless liquid. Tilting it slightly, he poured it over Lanyard's lips.

A strange tingling suffused the adventurer's body. The aching strain on his muscles relaxed, and he felt able to move again.

Ishtar was brought to his side. Priests and scientists alike bowed before her regal beauty. Though

they recognized Jadrow as their master, they could not overcome entirely their feeling for this white goddess who had lived with them for nearly a year.

Jadrow was talking, evidently trying to make them understand that both Earth people should be destroyed at once. They listened. A few of the oldest nodded their gray heads. They had the white god and goddess in their power. Their duty was to destroy. The planet would be ruled henceforth by men of science. Religion must be overcome. Mind and machinery would seize the balance of power.

This and much more did Jadrow tell his people. Lanyard couldn't understand a word, but he vaguely sensed the meaning back of Jadrow's words.

A venerable priest came to the adventurer's side and guided him to where the metal dome began its great circle from the wall.

His eyes swerved outward and downward, and instinctively he drew back. Below yawned a black abyss.

The venerable man motioned to Ishtar.

"He's offering you a choice of death, Bruce," she told him sadly. "Decapitation by ax, poison, or a leap into the sacrificial pit."

"And you, Ishtar? What happens to you when I'm gone?"

She smiled. "I go the same way as you, dear."

Lanyard opened his mouth to speak. Abruptly it closed. A faint humming was in his ears, hardly more than a whisper. His eyes hardened and swung upon the machine which generated the black ray so destructive to the prisms of Asa Cadmore's space conqueror.

An indicator on the machine must have moved. One of its attendants noticed it. He made a motion to attract Jadrow's attention. But Jadrow was watching the Earth people, waiting for their decision.

"Courage," whispered Lanyard. "I have a plan. It may and it may not work. It's our only hope. Tell the old priest I prefer to die by decapitation. Tell him also that as soon as my head rolls to the ground I will pick it up again and restore it to my body. Tell him the white god never dies."

Ishtar's face paled, but she told the aged priest what Lanyard had requested. And, with wonder on his face, he obeyed.

A block was brought in. A headsman was summoned. In his hands he carried a wide-bladed ax of the same bright material as the framework of the dark-ray machine.

Lanyard remained as calm as an Oriental. Obtaining the priest's permission, he examined the block. He nodded as if satisfied. Then he turned to the executioner and motioned the man to hand him the bright metal blade.

Bewildered by this show of calm, the man obeyed—and that was the last thing he ever did.

With a deft, swift whirl, Lanyard swung the instrument. The executioner fell, drenched in his own blood.

The suddenness of the attack left everyone inert except Jadrow. He lifted his metal tube. But before he could turn loose its paralyzing power, the blade of the axe cut a deep cleft in his wrist. He drew back, snarling, the metal tube falling to the floor.

Lanyard leaped lightly toward the great black eye of the machine. The ax whirled above his head. With all the strength of his arms, he struck at the glowing prism. There followed a brittle crash, and the

temple was suddenly filled with a dense, black dust.

Ishtar screamed. Jadrow had seized her with his uninjured hand and was dragging her toward the outer temple wall. His intention was plain. He was going to throw her over the edge into the sacrificial pit hundreds of feet below.

Owing to the darkness caused by the black powder, Lanyard could not see, but his ears told him that she was down close to the floor. And there was no mercy in his heart.

The blade in his hands cut a whistling arc through the air. Jadrow dropped in a twisted heap, his skull split through the center.

Uproar was on all sides. The adventurer picked up the girl's body. She had fainted. Holding her lightly on his shoulder, he plunged into the disordered mob of priests and soldiers. He followed the curving wall.

Feeling with an outstretched hand, he followed the curve of the wall till he came to an opening where a ramp led downward. Swiftly he moved down the incline with the girl on his shoulder.

Halfway down, the blackness disappeared and light showed. Certain of Jadrow's soldiers must have divined his purpose, for they were close at his heels.

The adventurer gained the outer door, leading to a court. Through this he ran. The plateau lay ahead. Beyond it the sacrificial pit. He stood in perplexity, not knowing which way to turn. His pursuers were in the courtyard. They saw him.

He backed away, still holding grimly to his weapon. They formed a circle around him. One of the priests appeared, his face black with anger.

The half-circle around him narrowed. He backed still closer to the edge of the pit. Other soldiers and attendants poured from the temple courtyard, their eyes ablaze. They were like a mob of hungry wolves.

Irresistibly they swept forward, driving the soldiers in front closer to the cornered man holding the girl on his shoulder. The scarlet blade lashed out. But the mob from behind was not to be denied. They surged forward in a tidal wave of fury.

The adventurer was forced back. Lean, coppery hands reached out. The scarlet blade cut a murderous swathe into them, but that swing threw Lanyard off balance. He was forced still farther back. And in doing so, he realized he had gone too far.

The ground trembled beneath him. There was movement beneath his feet, followed by the rasp of sliding gravel. So clear were his thoughts as the ground dropped beneath him that he hardly realized he was falling. He could see the mob of infuriated people of the planet rising upward, as if propelled by some invisible force.

But that clear thought lasted a split second only. In its place came an unreasoning desire to live. Futilely he tried to reach out and grab at the edge of the plateau now on the level with his eyes.

Seconds too late! The ground was reeling upward past his startled eyes. He was falling. Falling into what seemed endless space——

THERE WAS a rushing gale of air singing in his ears like the blast from a mighty propeller. Land and sky became a confused blur as he rocketed downward. He closed his eyes, took a firmer grip on the unconscious girl, and waited for the end.

Sudden light forced his eyes open.

The burning radiance hurt them so much he had to close them again. His head throbbed.

Abruptly his body crashed into something solid and real. He heard the whine of a motor, followed by the tinkle of broken glass. A black curtain whipped across his bewildered brain. Bedlam turned to forgetfulness.

How long he lay there, he did not know. When consciousness returned, he found himself propped against the wall of Asa Cadmore's laboratory. Ishtar was holding his hand and smiling.

The laboratory was a mass of twisted wreckage. The frames which had once held those marvelous prisms were bent and twisted, and the prisms were broken into small pieces.

Lanyard saw the old doctor-inventor standing amidst the wreckage, swinging a bar of iron. The old man had destroyed his own machine.

Ishtar read his mind. "Yes, Bruce. Father destroyed it."

"She's right," called out Cadmore. "The thing was too dangerous. And besides, I'm an old man that'll some day have grand-children."

Ishtar blushed.

The Astrophane

THE astrophane is an educational apparatus illustrating the stars and constellations of the universe, their location and relationship to one another, and for showing the Sun and the planets and their relative movement and path. The apparatus likewise affords simple adjustable means whereby an observer can find the position of the stars at any time of the day, on any date.

The astrophane consists of a base which contains the mechanism. A transparent globe is supported on the cover of the base. This celestial globe shows the visible stars and the various constellations, the constellations being shown by their boundary lines with their names. The stars are indicated by dots and star-shaped figures in their relative positions in the different constellations. Several thousand are designated. The more significant stars are connected by dotted lines so that the figures as pictured by the ancients may be readily found. The commonly known stars are designated by their names or Greek letters.

The order of magnitude is shown by their colors and relative sizes, those of the first magnitude being the largest and colored yellow. Stars of the second magnitude are somewhat smaller and are colored red; stars of the third magnitude are still smaller and are colored green; those of the fourth magnitude are smaller yet and colored blue, and stars of the fifth and sixth magnitudes are colored purple and shown as the smallest dots. The outline of the different constellations is purple.

Midway between the portions representing the north and south poles of the universe is located the celestial equator, indicated by a circumferential white line in a horizontal plane. The equator is divided into twenty-four equal spaces. The right ascension lines pass through the divisions thereof and extend from pole to pole.

In the Shadow of the Tii

The little god was almost forgotten —but not quite——!

by Ainslee Jenkins

IT WAS with hesitation that Tuaoa climbed the dark path. Now and again she paused irresolutely, and more than once she darted aside into the shelter of a bush, to crouch there trembling, listening for the night sound that had startled her, before going on again. But she did go on. Every time that she was on the verge of turning back, remembrance of her desperate need came to her, and she knew that there could be no retreat.

But her spirit quailed before the mystery of the night, and the deeper mystery of what lay ahead of her. Under the flow of the full-flowered moon, the island was as if in a trance—as if waiting for the old gods to rise and walk again in all their power. Nothing stirred, save occasionally a dreaming wind that made in the boughs and leaves of the trees a soft whispering; there was not even the sound of the waves washing on the reef far below. Silence, a breathless waiting silence, all around, entombing her; and inside her the beat, rapid and uneven, of her heart.

Tuaoa paused again, her slim, golden-brown body tensed and cold, the dark pools of her eyes frozen into the shadowy gloom ahead, where the faint trail parted. Here

was the threshold of the mystery, the beginning of the sacred ground. How dared she cross it? What awful wraithlike coils might not wrap round her, smothering out with cold spirit anger the sacrilege of her presence? She stood like a hunted thing, her breath coming quickly, her lips parted. The moonlight, here, fell upon her, touching with silvery fingers her long lustrous hair and the pirohiti flowers which she had wound through it. A sigh—*the wind?—was it only the wind?*—came from the darkness and the moving shadows that lay over the parting in the trail, and Tuaoa shuddered and a sob quivered in her throat. She turned suddenly. She faced back down the path—and she looked below.

Far below she could see the ghostly white slash of the beach and the thatched huts of the village, all dark; and, inside the reef, lying like a great bird with folded wings, she could see the schooner. She stared at it. As she looked, tiny shadows moved on the schooner's deck, and from its side a small boat dropped into the water. She saw one shadow climb down into the boat, and after a minute the boat shoved away from the schooner and crawled across the quiet water toward the beach. Faintly she could hear the splash of the oars; and though the shadow who stroked the oars was far away and to her eyes nothing but a shadow, in her mind she could see plainly his face.

And, seeing that face, Tuaoa's crouching body straightened, and she turned again toward the whispering shadows of the sacred ground. With quick, soundless steps she went forward. She did not glance back again.

The path that she followed now was old and would not have seemed a path to a stranger's eyes, for the feet that had made it were long dead. A thick-matted screen of foliage lay over it, and the light from the moon that filtered through was made strange and deceptive, and not like any earthly light. Grass had grown where formerly there had been bare soil. Tuaoa's feet rustled through, and she could feel it clinging to her skin, as if loath to let her pass. The great dew-clammy leaves, unseen in the misty light, drooped against her face. There were long, crimson-flowered tendrils that wound around her and drew their moistness lingeringly across her body, and there were other night-blooming things, huge feathery blossoms, that swayed gently out of the unknown to her, and breathed to her nostrils a perfume both sweet and evil. And to either side there were vaults of utter blackness, in which shapes without substance seemed to twist and weave. And all the time above her there was the soft sighing and the moaning.

For this was an ancient path that was holy to the ancient dead.

But Tuaoa brushed the leaves and the winding tendrils from her way, and though the quick breath heaved her bosom, she did not look aside or pause in helpless terror. She could hear murmuring around her the spirits of those who had once walked here, but she knew now that they knew her need and would suffer her to pass.

Then, at last, she stepped out of the gloominess into a clear space, where the clear, glowing stream of moonlight fell down as if into a silver pool. Here there was no untamed bush growth, save for the grass that floored it, although no one tended it to keep it clear. The dark whispering wall of the bush ringed

it on three sides, and on the fourth side there rose a great straight cliff of rock which was the peak of the island, touched with whiteness by the moon.

At the foot of the precipice, his stony eyes gazing at the human who had come to his temple, sat the Tii.

Tuaoa stood silent for long minutes, in awe and in terror. Then she ran like a deer across the grassy space and with a sob flung her smooth body down in supplication before the Tii.

LOUIS SPARTH rowed ashore from his schooner unhurriedly, with easy strokes. He always liked to take his time with pleasant things, drawing all the pleasure out of them slowly, making his enjoyment last as long as possible. Moreover, he had had a few drinks, just enough to put him in proper fettle, and he felt relaxed and good. He looked with satisfaction at the trim outline of the schooner as he drew away from it; he had spent most of the night sitting in his cabin by himself, drinking lazily, deliberately putting off the rendezvous he had ashore and reveling in the knowledge that he could go ashore whenever he wanted to and get what he wanted. It was a good life, he thought, running a trading schooner between the far-scattered islands of the South Pacific, and at times it was supremely good. Right now was one of those times. This island, Rurutea, being small and with only a few natives living on it, didn't bring him much in the way of trading, but he was very glad that he had stopped there.

With a final strong stroke, Sparth ran the boat up on the beach and clambered out. It was close to midnight, and he seemed to be the only living thing awake, for the few huts of the village were dark and silent. But Naru would be awake, and waiting for him anxiously. Smiling, Sparth lifted the two cases out of the boat and crossed the beach—a big man, fleshy and heavy-armed, clad in soiled duck trousers and a short-sleeved white shirt, with thick black eyebrows and closely clipped black hair and a blue-black stubble of beard on his sweaty face. The moonlight fell around him in weird, ghostly radiance. He was known all through the islands, Louis Sparth; better known by natives was the weight of his great meaty fists.

He passed the first three huts and came to the dark doorway of the fourth, which was the largest and set slightly apart from the others. In Tahitian, for he knew the soft tongue well, he called:

"Naru? Are you there, Naru?"

From the darkness inside, an answering voice said eagerly:

"Yes, yes! I am here!"

"Make some light," Sparth said.

An oil lamp was lighted inside the hut, and the white man entered.

Naru, crouched by the lamp, looked around with a half-hesitant smile which widened into a grin when he saw the two cases Sparth carried. "Good, good!" he muttered, grinning delightedly. He was a native of fifty or so years, with a wrinkled, cunning face, and little black eyes that were restless and quick-looking. His hair was grayish-white, and around the middle of his small wiry body he wore a dirty red cloth, a *pareu*—nothing else. He scuttled over to the cases and lifted out one of the bottles and held it up to the light, rolling his lips and gurgling: "Ah, ah! Good!"

"Yeah, you old souse," Sparth grunted in English, "there it is. Enough to keep you reeling for a couple of months."

"Ha?"

"I say, there is the whisky," Sparth said in Tahitian. "Two boxes, as we agreed. There is my part of the bargain. Now, where is yours?"

Naru did not appear to hear him. He was fumbling at the cork of the bottle.

"I am talking to you!" Sparth said harshly. "Where is the girl?"

"She will be here soon," Naru mumbled, squatting like a monkey with the bottle, all his attention concentrated on opening it.

Heavy lines grew in Sparth's sweat-dappled brow. He stretched out one great hand and seized the native's shoulder, twisting him around. His eyes were narrowed and ugly. "You hear me?" he said. "Where is the girl ? Is she not here, as you promised?"

"Na, na!" Naru chattered, still fumbling at the bottle. "She is not here, but she will be here soon! She will come—only wait a little! I promise you!"

Sparth's other hand shot out and jerked the bottle away. "None of that for you, then!" he said.

"Na, na! Only wait a little!"

"I do not wish to wait a little. I wish to leave now, with the girl."

"She will come! She will be here!"

Sparth's teeth grated together. He gripped the bare shoulder more firmly and shook the man's body like a rat. "Tell me where she is," he said slowly, "and take me to her, or I leave now, and I will take the whisky with me."

He knew the threat would work. Naru whined; and then he muttered:

"She—she has gone up into the middle of the island."

"What for? Why has she gone there?"

"She has gone up," Naru said in an uncertain whisper, "to the Tii."

"The Tii?" Sparth's face was puzzled. "What do you mean, the Tii? What is it?"

It was with fear that Naru said: "The Tii—the Tii is the Devil-God."

Louis Sparth laughed. He quivered with merriment. "Well, well!" he chuckled. "Are there still some of those things around? I thought the missionaries had broken them all up! So there's a real Devil-God here, eh? And you all go up and worship him on dark nights?"

"Na," Naru whispered, glancing about him uneasily; "no one goes to worship the Tii any more. But he is very old and very wicked and very powerful, this Tii, although he is not so powerful now as he was in the old time, because no one feeds the spirits inside him with blood. He sits up there in the sacred place, and every night the souls of those who died before him and the souls of the priests who served him gather in the darkness around the sacred place and moan and sob and chant their anguish that no one comes to him with a sacrifice to his power——"

He looked up at Sparth's grinning face, and his lips trembled a little as he went on: "And in front of him there is a great flat rock, and behind him there is a great cliff of rock, and in the old time the priests would take the sacrifice to the top of the cliff, and while the people below chanted and bowed low, the priests would fling the sacrifice from the cliff down through the air to the rock below. And the rock is dark with blood—ancient blood——" He shivered, as if the hut had suddenly become cold.

"And the girl has gone there?"

The old man nodded. "Yes. I

told her you were coming for her to-night, and she ran from me and cried out to me that she was going to the Tii." His voice rose, shrill and pleading. "But she will come back soon! Only wait a little while —and give me the whisky!"

"Come back soon, hell!" Sparth snarled angrily. "She'll wait up there until she sees the schooner leave. Trying to trick me, weren't you!" He bored the grip of his fingers in viciously. "Well, you don't trick me! And there will be no waiting! I'll go up and get her myself—and you will show me the way!"

"Na—na, na!"

"Or else I go now with the whisky, and smash your face before I go." He clenched his fist and raised it threateningly. "So?" he asked.

"Do not ask me—I cannot!"

Sparth struck him full in the face.

"Well?" he said between his teeth. "Again? You want to lose the whisky?"

And Naru, cowering back, looked with greedy eyes at the two cases of whisky—and then with an effort raised himself.

"Come, then!" he said. "Come! I will show you!"

But his courage did not last. Sparth had to keep urging him on with threats and curses. The old man quailed and shuddered at every shadow, his eyes staring uneasily from side to side, his dry lips moving soundlessly. Very slowly he led the sweating and impatient Sparth away from the village to the steeply rising shoulders of the hills. The moonlight frosted the tops of the hills, their lacy trees and vines bathed in a cold, lifeless pallor, but the flanks lay all in deep shadow, and it was up the flanks of the hills that the narrow trail wound. The night, in Naru's hut, had seemed warm, but here the darkness dampened it and there was a strange coolness in the wind.

The trail twisted and turned, rising always, and the soft lap and plash of the sea below was soon unheard. There would be minutes of utter silence—the silence and darkness and mystery of a great cavern far below the earth's crust—when there would not seem to be any air or any life or movement at all, when the whole night would seem to be pausing in breathless anticipation; and then, unexpectedly, the wind would stir in the surrounding gloom, and the trees and interweaving vines would wake from their trance and gently rub and sway, making soft sighings and rustlings, as if some great serpent were moving his pliant coils.

Naru, being a native and having from his ancestors a heritage of belief in the old, evil gods and the dark secrets of the earth, felt it all and knew fear to the roots of his being. A dozen times he halted and stood frozen, moaning his fear and protesting that he could go no farther; and then Sparth had to jab him and wrench him onward. And so they climbed, slowly and haltingly, Sparth stumbling over unseen obstructions in the path and cursing them and lashing out viciously at the tendrils and moist leaves that brushed against him—farther and farther, up and up, toward the lofty heart of the island.

And then finally, in a moment of dead silence, Naru came to a complete halt. A few feet ahead the trail parted. He pointed to the offshoot and said in a faint whisper:

"That is the sacred way. That is the way to the Tii."

"Well, go ahead!"

But here Naru stood fast. He could not be budged.

"Kill me if you will!" he wailed. "I would rather die here by your hand than be dragged by the spirits to the cliff and flung down to the Tii!"

Sparth snorted with disgust. He glanced at the divide in the trail.

"How far is it from here to your damned Tii?"

"Not far. The path runs straight, and soon it comes to an open space —and there are the spirits, and the Tii—— Where are you going?"

Sparth flung back over his shoulder: "I'm going to get the girl myself!"

"I warn you!" Naru cried. "The Tii's wrath will strike you! Your blood will spill on the sacrificial rock before him! Better wait, until the girl comes back!"

"Bah! Run away and wait yourself, and when I bring the girl down, I'll bring you a present. I'll bring you your precious Tii—yes, I'll throw it into your hut!"

He was gone. The shadows had swallowed his big form, and soon the sound of his quick, crashing steps through the bush was gone, too. There was left only the murmur and sighing rustle of the slow wind through the trees.

Naru jumped to his feet and scuttled back down the trail. And as he ran, he muttered:

"Laugh, then, fool of a white man! Yes, laugh—while you can! The Tii does not laugh!"

VERY OLD, the Tii was, and very small—an ancient dwarflike thing, his twisted body coated by the unnumbered centuries with dull grayish-green. He was scarcely perceptible against the great bare face of the cliff that loomed behind him; but size was not power. In the old days there had been Tiis who were massive in comparison with him, but now they were dead, their dark bodies shattered and scattered by the missionaries, while the little Tii of Rurutea survived. Forgotten, perhaps, by the sons of those who had come to him in the past to worship; but he sat still in the place of his power, and the blood-marked sacrificial rock was still before him and the huge cliff behind; and night after night, at the sacred hour, the voices out of the past spoke to him, and the shapes of the dead moved around him and chanted the old, moaning chants—and perhaps the Tii remembered, for on his flat, stony face there seemed to rest a smile.

Remembered, perhaps, the great days before the whites came, when the fierce oil-gleaming warriors would set out in all the bravery of battle against another island, and would return triumphant with captives from the people of that island. Then the priests would bedeck themselves in the long feathered robes and the captives would be stripped and bound, and the people of Rurutea would gather around them, singing the chants of hatred and vengeance.

And the procession, slow-paced, would wind up the trail, while the people sang to the gods of good and evil, who were symbolized in the body of the Tii; and they would prostrate themselves on the sacred ground, while, high above on the brow of the cliff, the priests would prepare the sacrifice. A moaning chant would rise and sob for minutes in the air, and die into silence —and in the silence the bodies would topple from the cliff, turning and twisting and shrieking as they fell, and smash on the rock before the Tii. And the Tii would be bathed in blood, would be fed, as the people shouted.

Many had died before him. Captives from alien islands mostly, but also many fair young maidens and men of Rurutea itself—transgressors of the tribal laws. Many had come up to him, trembling and afraid, on nights when a full moon rode the skies, to plead for his protection.

And now, after years of forgetfulness, one of his people lay stretched out before him in supplication. He had been remembered by one at least.

"Oh, great Tii," she begged, "hear me, and guard me with your might! I am Tuaoa, a daughter of the priests who served you, and whose sacred bones lie buried here. For their sake, I pray you to take mercy on me, for I am in peril and there is no one who comes forward to protect me.

"Our people are no longer proud and noble as they were in the days when they worshiped you, great Tii. They are listless and stupid and humble, like animals, and they subject themselves without protest to the white man's slightest wish. And now I—I, Tuaoa, a daughter of the holy priests!—am to be sold.

"Yes! For there is a white man now on our island who desires me, and who has bargained for me and bought me, as if I were a piece of cloth. He is ugly and harsh in manner, and he beats with his fat hands any who displease him, as if he were a god. When I saw him I hated him and avoided him—but he has power over our people, and he can gain anything that he desires. And so he went to Naru, my uncle, and Naru agreed to give me to him, in return for much of his fiery water. And I am helpless, great Tii! I am to be taken by this white man away from the place of my birth and despoiled by him—and lost——"

Tuaoa sobbed in her anguish. She raised her body, lovely in the moonlight, and reached out her hands and cried:

"Save for you, great Tii! For I believe in you, though the others in the village mock you as lifeless stone! Your power is not dead—the dark spirits still live in you! The spirits of my ancestors still walk before you and chant the old chants to you in the night, for I heard them as I came to you, and they are here now around me, though my human eyes cannot see them! I believe that you can stretch forth your hands and grasp the body of this white man and destroy him here on your holy altar and drink his evil blood! Take him, great Tii! Take him as a sacrifice, as you took evil ones in the old days, and save me from his corruption!"

Breathless, she was silent, and she was afraid. She had invoked the god. She had called on the dark powers. She who, like the others, had forgotten the Tii, had come to him and put herself within his reach. Would he hear her and take mercy on her for the sake of her ancestors, or would he instead seize her and avenge himself on her for the forgetfulness of the people of Rurutea?

She lay listening. At first she could hear nothing. Utter silence entombed the sacred place. The moonlight, the wicked little figure of the Tii, the great cliff behind, the gloomy, shadow-filled bush all around—silent with an unearthly silence. The spirits of the dead who were buried here, and the spirits of those who had died shrieking in fear on the sacrificial rock—had they heard, were they rising?

And Tuaoa heard a noise.

It was a soft, thudding noise from behind, and it was advancing. Her

heart paused and her throat was dry. She dared not look. The sound came closer. It was coming toward her. Her hands clenched and gripped in the grass; there was a great hollowness in her bosom. Coming, coming! Right behind her —upon her!

Her shoulder was gripped and she was wrenched up and around, and a voice that she knew well said harshly:

"So I've found you!"

She looked up into the grinning face of the man she had prayed the Tii to take: the exultant face of Sparth.

She tried to tear herself away from his rough grasp and his hot breath. But he only dug his fingers in the harder and jerked her closer to him.

"Scream your head off," he muttered. "It won't do you any good. And fight—go ahead, fight! I like it!"

She struggled vainly, beating at the great bulk of him with her small hands and straining back from the close grasp. And Sparth laughed hugely. He enjoyed it. With each blow he clasped her closer to him.

"Tried to get away, didn't you!" he grunted. "Up here, where you thought no one would follow you! But you're mine now, see? You're coming with me. I own you—and running away won't help you."

"You have desecrated the sacred place!" she panted.

"The sacred place, eh?" Still holding her encircled tightly in his arms, Sparth looked around. He looked up at the towering face of the cliff, at the rock below, and at the silent little figure which sat behind the rock. "So this is the famous Tii!" he said. "You've been praying to him, haven't you? Well, what's the matter with him?"

"He hears!" the girl cried. "And the spirits of his priests hear! And they will hurl you down from the cliff to this rock as they hurled evil-doers in the past!"

"Aw, don't be a fool!" Sparth growled. "Get all that stuff out of your head. Come on, we're going."

"Listen!" Her voice was quieter. "Listen now! Do you hear? Do you hear them? Do you hear them chanting the chant of sacrifice——"

Something was stirring in the hushed air over the sacred place. Perhaps only the wind in the trees —but somewhere there was a faint, sad murmuring—a sad, slow sound, far away and then close, rising and falling whisperingly, so faint and so indefinite that it seemed to be unreal and imagined, and then for a moment so close that it was very real. And Tuaoa turned her eyes to the figure of the god.

But the white man snorted angrily.

"Bah!" he said. "Every time you hear the wind in the bush, you think it's your damned Tii! You think that——"

"It is the Tii. It is the long-dead priests chanting," she whispered.

"Yes?" Sparth glowered down at the small stone figure. "Well, see what he thinks of this! I promised I'd bring him down as a present for your crazy old uncle, and here he goes!"

And, holding the girl's form in one arm, he bent and grasped the Tii, wrenched with all his strength and tore the figure loose.

With one swift movement Tuaoa broke free from his clasp. She ran a few steps and then turned and faced him. There was a fiery light in her eyes. Slowly she raised one arm and pointed at him.

"Now," she said, "you are dead. Now you will hear the chanting

grow louder and louder, and you will see the priests rise from the earth and come toward you, and with their chanting in your ears, you will be thrown down before the Tii and pay for your blasphemy!"

"Come back here!" he shouted furiously.

"Come back—to you, who are marked by the spirits?"

"When I catch you this time, by Heaven," he swore, "I'll beat you for this. Come back!"

"You will never touch me again. You are marked. Listen!—the chanting grows already!"

With an oath, Sparth tossed the figure of the god to the ground and sprang after her. But she turned fleetly, and with quick silent steps fled across the open space into the gloom of the bush growth, melting from his sight like a shadow.

Cursing, he crashed after her. The weird darkness of the half-seen trees and vines enfolded him, and the sacred place was left deserted again, with the little stone Tii lying on his side behind the sacrificial rock; and on his cold lips there seemed to be still the same smile.

Sparth ran, at first, with all the speed he could muster. He charged ahead like a great angry bull, sweeping the vine tendrils and leaves and branches aside by brute force, snorting and muttering all the time in anger. He plowed through the bush in the direction he had seen the girl take. There was no trail here, nor anything like a trail, and the ground was not level, as was that over which he had come to the place of the Tii. But his fury disregarded all obstacles. Stumbling, leaping, hurling his body through the clinging growth, he ran like a thing gone mad, with no thought in his head as quickly as possible. He ran beside that of getting the girl back blindly for several minutes. Then, just as the ground began to rise steeply, his foot caught in a root and he went sprawling full length into the sodden earth.

Panting, cursing, wiping mud from his face, he sat up, a hurricane of wrath boiling inside him, fumbled around behind him, found the root and ripped it out and flung it savagely into the darkness. He lurched to his feet. His anger calmed a little then and, seeing how easily he might get himself lost, he listened for a sign of the girl's whereabouts.

Yes! There, straight ahead, a rustling, crackling sound—not far away. She had not gained on him. He grinned, and forgot the hurt of his wrenched foot. He'd have her soon. He strode on again, though more cautiously and peeling his eyes to keenness against the deceptive gloom and shadows. No need to get excited, he told himself. She couldn't escape.

The ground climbed now, and it was very steep. He was soon panting again from the effort. Gradually, as his impatience rose, he quickened his pace. He stumbled often, for it was hard to see anything, and branches and spiky vines swished into him suddenly, seeming to come out of nothingness. Up, up, up—— Something ripped his shirt, and a twig jabbed his face painfully.

"Hey!" he shouted. "What's the idea? You can't get away! And the longer you keep this up, the worse it'll be for you! Hear me?"

He listened. No soft voice answered. But she was there—just a little way ahead—for he could still hear the rustling sound.

"Damn you!" he yelled, his anger suddenly fury, and he broke into a mad run again.

Several times he paused to listen,

and each time he heard the sound that beckoned him on, and each time it seemed to be closer. The sweat was rolling from him after a while, and he was gasping and wheezing for air, and mixing his gasps with curses; and he screamed threats at the girl.

But soon he no longer cursed or threatened her; he could no longer spare the breath; all his energies were concentrated into a grim, dogged fight onward. He wavered and staggered on crazily. No longer did he bother to brush the unseen vines from his path; he forced through them without protest, suffering their lacerations. He persevered as he had never persevered before. Give it up? Turn back? Never, never!—for the rustling sound ahead was so close now, and closer and closer; he could hear it even above the beating of his heart and the grotesque, wheezing noise that was his breathing. It was almost next to him, that sound that he chased! In another minute he would have her—in another minute he would sink his hands into her; and when that minute passed without sight of her, but with the sound louder, it was the next minute that he thought of, and after that, the next, and the next——

Louder grew the strange sound in the gloom ahead, and more and more blindly Sparth pursued it.

Now! Now he was there!

He burst out of the shadows into clear moonlight.

And he shrieked.

Clear moonlight! A clear space! And the girl, who should have been only feet away from him—she was not there!

But the sound was!

What was it, this thing he had been following?—that hung in the air and sobbed and moaned and grew and grew, drowning out his beating heart and his gasps, coming in on him, surrounding him? What was it? Where did it come from?

A moaning, it was—but no! It was rising! It was a chant! A chanting of many voices, deep, full-bodied, rising into a great flood of sound! Converging on him!

And these things that were rising wraithlike before him, *what were they?*

Ghostly shapes were rising from the ground before him, coming toward him, arms outstretched. They were men! They were clad in long, feathered robes, and their eyes were burning, and their dark faces were set in terrible wrath—and they were staring at him, while all around him was the triumphant chant from the hundreds of unseen throats.

And in the eyes of these men he saw——

Louis Sparth, a tattered, witless thing, screamed his horror to the clear heavens and ran staggering across the open space his wild pursuit had brought him to, until there was no longer any ground beneath his feet, and he fell. Twisting and turning and shrieking, he fell through hundreds of feet of nothingness, seeing in his last hideous moment of life the blood-marked sacrificial rock that lay waiting below, and the little figure of stone that lay toppled over behind the rock—the smiling figure of the damnable Tii!

TUAOA ROSE from where she had lain hidden all the time in the bush that fringed the sacred ground. She went with bowed head and slow steps to the Tii. She looked at the broken, bloody thing that now was on the sacrificial rock. She said:

"O Tii, your power is still great, your spirits still live. You heard

my plea, and you brought this man to the brow of the cliff, and your priests who waited there hurled him to you. His blood is yours."

She was silent in the moonlight.

"And my life is yours, great Tii," she said. "To worship you and bring back the faith in you. For I believed—and I have seen!"

And somewhere—*the wind?—was it only the wind?*—a soft, slow sound stirred in the calm moonlit air over the sacred ground of the little Tii of Rurutea.

The Next Issue of Astounding Stories

WILL CONTAIN

A story that will awaken

MORE CONTROVERSY

Than any story ever published in a

SCIENCE-FICTION MAGAZINE

ANCESTRAL VOICES

By Nat Schachner

Slices daringly through the most precious myths, legends, and folklore of mankind, and attacks boldly a present-day wave of race-hysteria.

This is not just "another story."

You will LIKE it; or HATE it; and will READ it AGAIN.

ANCESTRAL VOICES

in the December

ASTOUNDING STORIES

by JACK WILLIAMSON

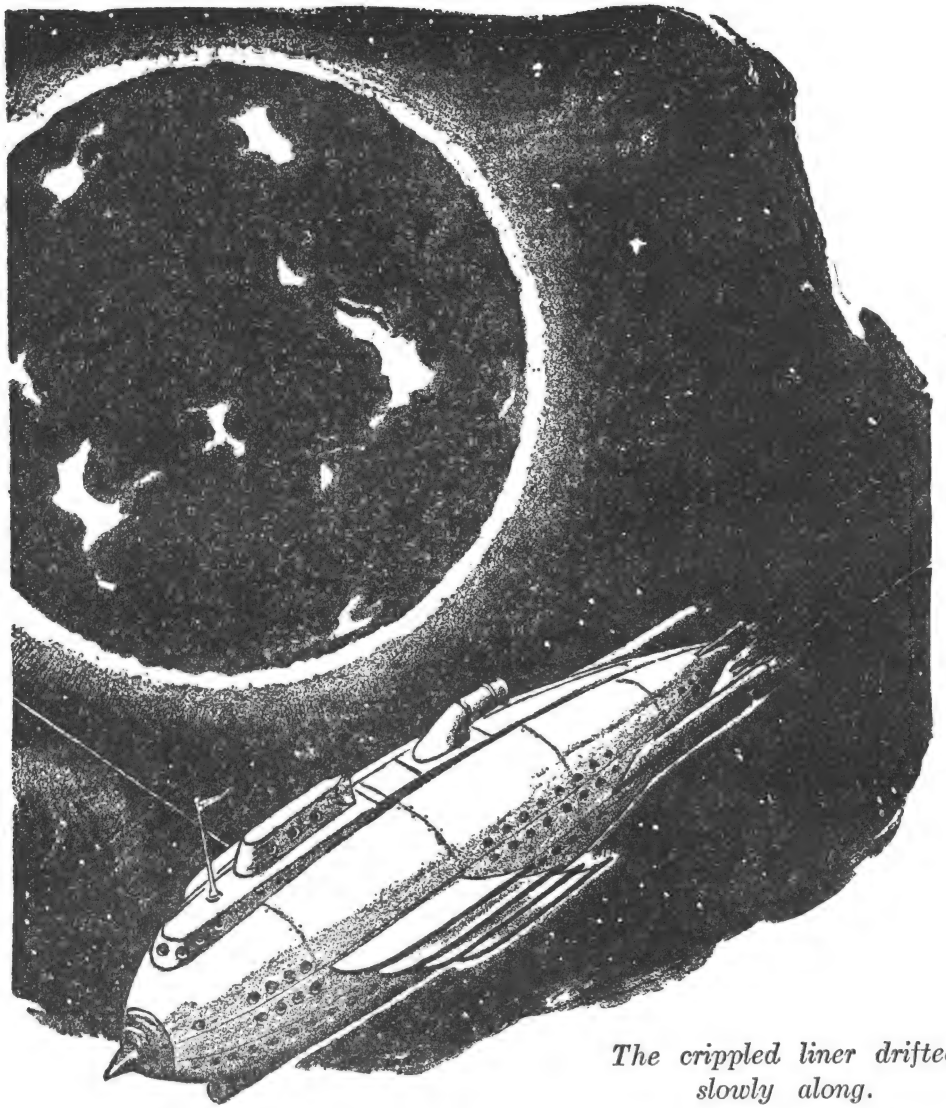
Dead Star Station

THE DIFFERENCE between a fool and a genius can be stated in one word—success. And success had not found Gideon Clew. We all tolerated the old man; most of us pitied him; some of us genuinely liked him. A neat, trim old fellow, white-haired, marvelously erect for his age, with cheeks like wrinkled red apples, and bright, sober blue eyes.

The lisp in his speech made him unintentionally droll. That must have been the chief reason why he had been so long scorned and obscure. For the lisp increased with his earnestness; he could never put his great idea into words without inadvertently rousing a desire to laugh.

Fourteen of us were waiting on Dead Star Station, in the wild, lonely Orion Passage, for the coming of the space liner *Bellatrix*. Thirteen men and a girl. Twelve of us made up the crew of the station. And the thirteenth man was Gideon Clew.

The old man, of course, had no official right to be upon the station. But mild old Captain Manners was soft-hearted, and the rest of us sympathetic. Gideon Clew had been aboard since before most of us were born—fifty years, he said. Fifty years is a long time for a man to be



The crippled liner drifted slowly along.

shut up in a little metal world, away from life. He had lost his place outside; he had no one to go to. It would have been cruelty to send him away.

He had been a generator-man until, ten years before, the service had automatically retired him, sent out another man to take his place. We let him stay aboard, wrapped up in the Great Idea that—had success chosen to crown it—would have made him famous. We even dug into our own pockets to make up his quarterly pay check, to provide funds to carry on the experiment that was the old man's life.

And the girl was Tonia Andros.

Eight years old, she was, a slim little wisp of elfin gravity. She was not actually a beautiful child; her mouth was too wide and her nose turned up impudently. But her dark eyes were wistfully grave, and all of us loved her. After all, men so far from home, from family, from all

that is life, could not be critical of her.

The story of Tonia Andros must have been another of those adventures of space that are the stuff of romance. We knew but a chance fragment of it. Months before, we had found the wrecked freighter drifting. A meteor stream from the nebula had struck it; the rusty hull was riddled, and all on board—save Tonia—were frozen and dead.

She had been sealed between the valves of the main air lock, where some one must have placed her after the catastrophe. The tube of oxygen in the little cavity with her was exhausted; she was unconscious from asphyxiation and cold. But we reached her in time.

But not in time to save the ship. The wreck was already fast in the relentless gravitation-field of the Dead Star. It went plunging down to incandescent ruin upon that black and dying sun, carrying with it the history of Tonia Andros, and whatever patrimony may have been hers.

The experience must have been painful; her tortured mind may have sought relief by blotting that time out of memory. Whether she remembered more we never knew, but she would tell us only her name.

Tonia was a friend to each of us. But she and old Gideon Clew felt a particular affinity. The little girl haunted his cabin, and he seemed not to fear her hands upon the precious apparatus he had gathered there.

The child must have brought something of the warm glow of life back into a nature that had been shut off from life too long. Gideon turned aside from his invention to make toys for her, with his skilled old hands. Yet he worked ever harder, and he told us that he was going to adopt her, give her home and education, when his discovery was perfected.

"When his discovery was perfected"—that phrase had been in his talk for forty years and more.

Still the thing was not done, and all of us save Gideon Clew knew that it was chimera. Now we were waiting for the *Bellatrix* to come down the passage. Captain Manners was retiring; our new officer was to come upon the liner. Manners was to take Tonia with him—though the child was not eager to leave Gideon Clew—to try to find a home for her.

The old man himself was torn between impatience and relief as we waited for the liner. It was almost breaking his heart to part with the child, who must have been his only really intimate companion in those five decades. But he was madly anxious for the vessel to come with a shipment of parts for his invention, that he had ordered a year before.

Time can pass slowly on Dead Star Station. A small world, completely isolated. The station is really an obsolete war-rocket, too antiquated to fly with the system's fleets. A corroded metal hull, some two hundred feet long. Space aboard is limited, quarters cramped, means of diversion lacking.

But beyond the station's vitrolar ports is space in abundance. The view must be the most weirdly colossal, the most awesome, in all the galaxy. The Great Nebula spans the sky like an octopus of living flame. A vast, angry sea of swirling white fire, eerily tinged with the green of *nebulium,* its twisting streamers reaching out like incandescent tentacles.

Unthinkably vast, those tentacles seem to grasp the Dead Star. That cyclopean cold sun is a little black disk limned against livid flame. Its

dark face is patched with marks of sullen crimson—illimitable seas of yet molten lava, for the Dead Star is not utterly dead.

The hurtling meteor-streams and the seas of incandescent gas that make up the Great Nebula of Orion form the most stupendous barrier to trans-stellar navigation in the entire galaxy. Light itself, at one hundred and eighty-six thousand miles per second, takes three years and more to cross it.

But there is a way through. The Orion Passage. A lane kept cleared of darting meteors and burning gas by the colossal gravitation of the Dead Star, a titanic dark sun that lurks like a black spider in the bright web of the nebula, reaching out with resistless, invisible force for what it may draw to destruction.

No ship has ever visited the Dead Star. No rocket could pull away from its inconceivable surface gravity. It is estimated that a human body would weigh well over a hundred tons upon its surface—enough so that the bones would break and the flesh run away from them like water. The idea is unpleasant.

The station, equipped with powerful electron-blast motors to keep her clear of the giant sun's inexorable pull, was established as an aid to navigation in the passage, her duties being to chart the continually shifting meteor-streams, inform passing shipping by photophone of the safer courses, and to go to the aid of any endangered vessels.

Time passed slowly upon the tiny metal world of the station, that was but a mote hung between titan black sun and the changeless fiery glory of the nebula. But at last the *Bellatrix* came. And from dull weeks of waiting, we were plunged incontinently into mad confusion.

The *Bellatrix* was a new vessel, of three times the station's tonnage, regularly plying the passage. Those of us who could went aboard the liner during the little time the valves were coupled, to enjoy briefly the spaciousness of the vessel, her cosmopolitan atmosphere, the gossip of her curious passengers.

Vance, our photophone operator, returned with one interesting bit. He talked to one of her passengers, a man in an invalid chair, with a bandaged head. This man told him that the *Bellatrix* carried an immensely valuable cargo of uranium ingots, and that her officers had been warned to beware of Skal Doon, the inter-stellar buccaneer.

Even so, there was no great novelty in a warning against Skal Doon. He was one of the last freebooters of space, the most notorious and daring. For three decades he had been a terror of the void, escaping capture partly by a flair for originality, partly by ruthless cruelty in the elimination of opponents, and largely by an intimate knowledge of the mazes and fiery ways of the Great Nebula, which he knew as no other man. It is curious that men spoke of him with a certain admiration and respect, which he deserved as little as a human being could.

Gideon Clew and Tonia Andros parted at the valves. The child's wistful eyes were frankly tearful as Captain Manners led her away, and old Gideon's lisping voice choked oddly. And then the old man went to claim the long, carefully wrapped package that had come for him—the anxiously awaited parts for his invention.

Presently the new captain came aboard the station. Clive Kempton was his name. A tall young man, in severe white uniform, with the eagle insignia of the service on his cap. His face was lean and stern.

We saw at once that he was the sort that takes responsibility very seriously, that considers regulations much more holy than they are—perhaps because of a subconscious fear of criticism.

A little time of bustling, mad confusion. Stores coming aboard, cylinders of oxygen, drums of fuel for our generators. Then the last shout of farewell. The valves were sealed again, uncoupled. And the *Bellatrix* went on.

We upon the station were left—or so we supposed—to wait through other weary weeks, until another vessel picked its way between the flaming walls of the passage. None of us had premonition we were to see the liner again, so soon and under such distressing circumstances.

HUME, the station's mate, was in the bridge room with the new captain, when Gideon Clew limped hesitantly in, with a hopeful smile upon his red, wrinkled face.

"Captain, thir?" he lisped, a little timidly.

"What is it?" Kempton asked brusquely. "What's your name?"

He did not intend to be unkind. He was taking his new command much too seriously. The vague, blind hostility and the supernal power of the Great Nebula and the titanic Dead Star had already set their print of terror in his soul.

"Gideon Clew, thir. You thee, thir, I have invented a gravity-screen. I've just installed the last parts, that came on the *Bellatrix*. Pleathe, thir, may I use power from the ship's generators to test it?"

"What's this? A shield, you mean, against the force of gravitation?"

"Yeth, thir. I've been working on it many yearth, thir."

Perhaps, if it had not been for Gideon's lisp, Kempton would have listened. But the lisp made the bright-eyed, apple-cheeked little man unconsciously and pathetically funny; and the more serious he became, the worse his lisp. And Kempton was young; he had not yet learned that regulations are made to be broken.

"How much power do you need?" he asked.

"Two hundred thousand kilowatts, thir."

Kempton, astonished, looked inquiringly around at Hume.

"Why, that's the full capacity of our generators!"

"I know, thir. But just a few minuteth——"

"Just who are you, anyhow?" the captain demanded.

Gideon's wide blue eyes stared at him in bewilderment, and Hume spoke to explain the old fellow's status upon the station.

"You know, it's against regulations for you to be here at all," Kempton said. "You must prepare to leave, Clew, when the *Bellatrix* returns. I don't understand how it happened."

"But, thir, the power——"

"I must refuse your extraordinary request. Of *course!* I want you to realize this is not a playhouse. And not an old man's home. I don't understand it!"

The serious, bright eyes about the man's little red cheeks were fixed intently upon Kempton's face for a long time. Then they began to blink, and Hume saw huge, slow tears gathering in them.

"Yeth, thir," Gideon whispered. And he stood there.

Kempton and Hume were busy with the astrographic charts, checking their maps of the nebula's flaming streamers, which flooded the bridge with greenish, ghostly radiance. Kempton seemed to forget

Clew, and the little man stood there blinking. It must have been ten minutes later that he spoke again.

"Captain Kempton, thir?"

"Eh? Oh, *you're* still here? What is it?"

The bright eyes winked bravely.

"Captain, you don't understand, thir. I've been working on my gravity-screen nearly fifty yearth. Ever since I first came here, thir. It was the Dead Thtar, tho near. I got books on electronics. I studied hard, thir.

"Other men have come and gone, thir. Even the mechanics stay only thix yearth, you know. Because it is tho lonely. Now, thir, it is done. An electronic field, a screen of ions, that flows over the surface of any conductor, and reflects, dissipates, the radiations of gravity."

Kempton laughed. He did not intend to be malicious; there was something irresistibly funny about Gideon Clew, lisping so seriously.

"Why, gravitation isn't even a radiation, man! It's a strain in the ether, a curvature——"

"I know, thir, that is one theory. But I have proved it is a radiation, on the order of the subelectronic particles——"

Kempton was suddenly brusque. Angry with himself because he had laughed.

"Anyhow, you'll have to give it up. We've no fuel to waste on fool experiments."

He bent over the charts again. Gideon Clew turned dazedly toward the door, moisture glittering unheeded on his bright, wrinkled cheeks. It is not easy for a man to give up what he has worked for all his life—not when he has labored and planned and dreamed as had Gideon Clew.

He turned and lisped again: "Captain, thir?"

"What is it *now?*" Kempton showed his annoyance at the interruption.

"Captain, there's Tonia Andros. A little girl, that we took off a wreck. When my invention is successful, thir, I am going to adopt her——"

"Sorry, Clew, I'm busy." Kempton nodded at the door.

"Yeth, thir."

Gideon Clew blinked and turned slowly again. He fumbled for the door knob with twisted old fingers, and could not see it. "Wait!" came Kempton's brisk voice, and he turned, sober blue eyes shining with incredulous hope.

"Thir?"

"I suppose you've a clutter of apparatus in your cabin. See that it's cleared out. Have it all in order when you leave."

"But captain, thir, I *can't* dismantle my apparatus. I'm an old man. I'll never have money, or a chance to try it again. Oh, don't you *thee?*"

There was something in the appealing blue eyes that Kempton could not resist.

"All right," he said suddenly. "I'll have Mr. Colin supply you the power-output, for exactly five minutes. I shouldn't do it; it's against regulations."

Gideon's face was wrinkled into a grin of radiant joy; his round blue eyes shone mistily.

"Go on, now, and try it," Kempton said. "And afterward clear the rubbish out of your cabin."

Gideon vanished, and the station's lights were dim for five minutes, and the electron-blast motors dead for that long, allowing us to drift to the unopposed drag of the Dead Star's relentless gravity.

During those minutes, Gideon Clew was furiously busy in his cabin, among complex apparatus

that filled it so completely that there was scant room for his body. Transformers hummed, and the tall vacuum tube that the *Bellatrix* had brought filled with pallid, virescent fire. He closed a switch that grounded one of its electrodes to the station's hull. A feeble green glow shimmered along the wire.

Gideon Clew felt the ship pause beneath him as that slow drift toward the Dead Star was arrested! Crying out from sheer pain of joy at success after fifty years of toil, he watched in proud wonder.

Plop!

He heard the hollow, muffled sound. Heart sinking, he spun around. Green radiance was gone from tube and wire. The new tube had burned out!

"Captain, thir," Gideon lisped with earnest eagerness, back on the bridge, "didn't you feel our drift-acceleration stop, when my electronic screen cut off the attraction of the Dead Thtar?"

"No, I'm afraid not. And remember our bargain, now. You've had the power. Now you must dismantle your machine, and get it ready to take on board the *Bellatrix*."

"But captain, I know——"

Clive Kempton turned, reached for an ellipsograph. He was a young man, full of his new responsibility. And he did not realize how much Gideon's experiment had meant to the old fellow.

The bright, sober eyes were blinking very fast. Trembling hands fumbled blindly at the door. Gideon Clew let himself out, and stood a long time leaning against the wall. An old man, sick with failure. He was glad that none came near him.

The *Bellatrix,* flashing onward along the flaming corridor of the passage, was still in photophone communication with us. A private call came for Gideon Clew, and Vance, our operator, sent the steward to find the old man.

"A call for *me,* thir?" he lisped in excited astonishment as he shuffled into the photophone room. It must have been the first in fifty years.

Vance made him sit down in front of the projection screen, and tuned his set and synchronized the scanning tube. The bright-hued geometric figures of the registration pattern vanished suddenly, and on the screen was Tonia Andros.

"Oh, Granddad!" she cried, in a voice atremble with eager joy and relief. And she ran forward until she went out of focus, and blurred.

Smiling reassuringly, Gideon lisped: "What ith it, Tonia?"

Vance and the other operator were inevitable eavesdroppers, for without their continual adjustments, the narrow etheric nerve between the ships would have snapped in half a minute. The two seemed to forget them.

The little girl's image sharpened again, and she stood there, bewildered, dark eyes round and huge and solemn.

"Oh, Granddad!" she pleaded—she always called him that. "I'm *so* lonesome! I made them let me talk to you. I want you to come and stay with me. Please, won't you? You said you would come when your invention is done. *Please* hurry!"

Gideon clenched his gnarled old hands, and his blue eyes glistened.

"No, Tonia," he whispered. "No, I'm afraid——" He choked and stopped. Tears rolled out on his cheeks and he did not heed them. "No, Tonia," he cried again. "My invention—will never be—finished. And, Tonia, I—have to go away——"

"But, Granddad!" Her grave voice was distressed. "You promised me! You *must!*"

"Tonia!" he cried convulsively. "Tonia, I will! In spite of everything! I'll come after you!"

She laughed happily. Then the other operator must have spoken to her, for she looked away from the screen, and back again.

"Good-by, Granddad!" she called. "I'll wait!"

"Good-by, Tonia," whispered Gideon Clew. But the connection had already been cut, and he spoke to a blank and empty screen.

NOT AN HOUR later, Vance's call-bell rang again, urgently.

When the set was tuned, he saw the *Bellatrix's* operator on the screen. And swift realization of tragedy overcame him. The man's cap was gone, his face haggard, his eyes wild with desperation. His white uniform, Vance saw, was torn at the shoulder, one sleeve crimson with blood that dripped and spattered on the floor.

The man's lips were working nervously; he was gasping. Apparently he was too frightened to speak.

"Cool off!" Vance shot at him. "What is it?"

"Come——" he cried incoherently. "For life's sake! They murdered the captain! Come!"

Vance heard blows upon the *Bellatrix's* door, and shouts beyond it. The wounded operator turned and stared mutely, as three men burst it open and came in, all of them carrying glowing ionic needles. The operator stood facing them, trembling, helpless, blood dripping from his sleeve.

Vance knew the leader of the three at once by one feature of his face, described in many warnings and offers of reward. He had no nose. Only a blue ray-scar where it should have been, with two black slits for nostrils.

Skal Doon! The space pirate! The "terror of the nebula"!

"Calling the eagles, eh?" he demanded of the operator. His voice was thin and shrill. Vance had a vague feeling that he had heard it before, though he knew he had never seen Skal Doon. "Setting the service on Skal Doon, eh?"

His hand tightened on the ionic needle, and it spat blue sparks. The operator threw up his arms and spun around, screaming. The ray had burned away his face, but sickening minutes passed before he collapsed and was dead.

Skal Doon watched him until he was a shuddering heap on the floor. Then he looked into the screen, at Vance. And Vance never forgot his amazing eyes. Large, they were, limpidly brown, soft and gentle as a woman's.

"So our friend did call you, eh?" his thin voice shrilled. And he kicked the trembling thing at his feet. "And maybe you have seen enough so you can guess what happens to eagles that swoop at Skal Doon!"

Vance's sickness at the horror he had seen must have been evident enough. The mild brown eyes smiled at him; the high voice made a ribald jest at his condition. Then the ionic needle came up again, spitting blue fire, and the screen went blank.

Only then did Vance recognize that shrill voice. It was the voice of the man with the bandaged head and the invalid's chair, with whom he had talked on the *Bellatrix*. Of the man who had talked, ironically, of Skal Doon.

The *Bellatrix*, of course, was not a fighting ship. Her only weapon was a long rocket-torpedo tube that had been mounted, ironically enough, for protection against the

very buccaneer who had seized the vessel.

Though the station's fighting equipment was obsolete, consisting only of four rocket-torpedo tubes and the Sealby Arc—which hurled a blasting shaft of electricity from the generators—we might easily enough have destroyed the liner. But destruction was not our aim; we had to consider the hundreds of passengers aboard.

"We'll have to run them down, capture the ship," Kempton told Hume, on the bridge. "And that torpedo-tube will make them hard to take."

"Doon knows how to play his cards," Hume agreed.

Even with the station's powerful electron-blast motors, installed for her ceaseless battle with the gravitation of the Dead Star, we did not come up quickly with the fleeing liner. It was ten hours before the battle began. After the long tension of suspense, it was a swift and confusing thing.

Gideon Clew came running up hopefully to Kempton, soon after the *Bellatrix* was sighted—a silvery speck, fleeing between the white curtains of the Great Nebula, the violet, fluorescent trail of her electronic motors streaming out behind her.

"Captain, thir! In the battle—what do you want me to do?"

His round blue eyes were bright with eager determination. But Kempton turned on him impatiently.

"Just keep to your cabin, Clew. The crew is complete without you."

"But, thir," he lisped protestingly. "Tonia! I must help save her! She——"

"Go below, Clew."

Red, wrinkled face suddenly downcast, sober eyes glittering, the old man stumbled out of the room.

As the station came up with him, Doon began to fire. The first rocket we were able to avoid, by an abrupt change of course. The second and the third were detonated at a distance by the searing flame of the Sealby Arc.

But the fourth slipped past the searching finger of the arc, a hurtling mote, a miniature ship, death-laden. It struck amidships. The station lurched sickeningly to its explosion. Fragments of the beryllo-steel hull were driven inward with terrific force. And an instant later our precious air was screaming out through the sudden, ragged opening, chilled by expansion until snow glittered in it.

Colin, the chief engineer, was killed outright by a splinter of the hull. Hale, the second, darted at once with his two helpers to repair the hole, snatching down the metal patches and the thermite welding units that always hung ready on the wall.

The task was not easy. One of the helpers was carried bodily through the opening by the outrushing air to hideous death. Then patches were flung over the ragged orifice, and the major leak soon stopped. But the shock had strained all the seams of the old hull. Though Hale and the remaining assistant found and mended many breaks, the vital air continued to hiss out alarmingly.

Thus, for a time, the generators were deserted by their regular crew, and just at the moment when power was most necessary. The station was swiftly overhauling the *Bellatrix*. On the bridge, Kempton was screaming a fervid appeal into the speaking tube.

"For life's sake, Colin, give me power! For the Sealby Arc! Before they can reload that tube!"

But the engineer was dead, and the surviving members of his staff

were completely engaged in a desperate battle to preserve the station's essential atmosphere.

Yet the generators came again to sudden animation, and the blue arm of the electric arc reached out once more. It touched the rocket-torpedo tube in its armored housing above the hull of the *Bellatrix*. And the tube became fused and crumpled metal.

Skal Doon, though thus robbed of his only offensive weapon, was still not defeated. He displayed again that resource which so often had saved him, an original daring worthy of a greater man. The liner deliberately changed her course, swung about in a long curve, and plunged downward toward the Dead Star.

"Diving for the star!" cried Hume in dismay. "Going to smash, rather than surrender!"

With silent attention, Kempton was studying the motion of the argent ellipsoid through his instruments. He laid them aside at last, and turned suddenly to the mate.

"No. Skal is cleverer than that He is planning to fall *around* the Dead Star, and back away from it."

"Around it? How——"

"The *Bellatrix* is on a parabolic orbit, like a comet's. It will flash down to the star, curve close around it, and fly off again. Or *would*—if we weren't here to stop it."

"You're going to follow?"

"Of course. We'll run them down, fasten the station alongside with the magnetic anchors. The *Bellatrix* has no weapon. If Skal won't surrender, we'll storm a valve, or cut through the hull."

He looked at the barometers, and his face fell with alarm.

"That last shot finished us, anyhow. We're gone unless we can get aboard the *Bellatrix*. The pressure is down two pounds already. Our air won't last three hours, at this rate."

The silvery hull of the liner was plunging toward the Dead Star with motors full on. Kempton shouted again and again into the speaking tube for more power. No voice answered, but the generators always responded.

The *Bellatrix* was now but a few miles ahead. Abruptly she began a confusing series of maneuvers to evade the station, twisting, swerving. But, lighter and more powerful, the station kept close behind her.

The liner turned back at last, plunging directly at the other ship with manifest intent to ram it, to the destruction of both vessels. Kempton shouted a wild command, the generators replied instantly, and the station slipped out of the way.

Another order, and a heavy magnetic anchor leaped from its catapult toward the passing ship, dragging its cable. It struck the liner's hull, clung fast.

Like a silver fish, the *Bellatrix* plunged and darted for a time upon the line. But the smaller station held her adroitly, giving her opportunity neither to ram nor to break the cable. And steadily the ships were drawn together as the cable was wound upon its drum.

The purple, fluorescent blast from the liner's motors was at last shut off. The two ships drifted side by side, at the cable's ends—hurtling down toward the black, red-flecked disk of the Dead Star.

The station's air, leaking steadily through opened seams, was swiftly growing unbreathable. Men panted at ordinary tasks; a deadly chill stole through the ship.

Kempton called us all to the upper deck, ordered us to don space suits. He served out ionic needles

and other weapons, ordered torches got ready for cutting through the liner's hull, if that proved necessary.

"Colin," he called into the speaking tube, "bring your men on deck. We're going to abandon ship."

"This ith not Colin," lisped a voice from the tube.

"Who? *Clew?* What the——"

"Colin ith dead, thir. I have been running the generators. I was a generator-man forty yearth, you know."

Kempton's voice was queer. "All right, Clew. Good work. Come on and get into your space suit."

Five minutes later, the eleven of us were dragging ourselves across between the ships in clumsy, inflated suits, laden with weapons. As weird a journey as can be imagined, it was. Eleven swollen giants, climbing by their hands along a cable between two vessels in the void. For background, the flaming streamers of the Great Nebula, and the malign black disk of the Dead Star.

Then happened an unexpected thing—a dreadful thing.

The main valve of the *Bellatrix* flung suddenly wide, and a score of human figures spewed out. We thought at first that the pirates were foolishly leaving the ship to beat off our attack. But these men had no space suits.

In the blast of air they were thrown clear of the ship, to become, in the vacuum of space, queer, swollen monsters. But, horribly, they did not immediately die. Sprawling in the airless void, they tore at their throats, faces contorted with agony unutterable.

An atrocious murder of helpless passengers, most of us thought. We dragged ourselves hastily on, hot with resentment, to seize the valve before it could be closed, to fight our way from it into the ship and avenge this thing.

Strangely—ominously—our entrance was not opposed.

When we opened the inner seal, Skal Doon, alone and apparently unarmed, met us on the deck inside. A curious grim smile was upon his noseless face, and his mild, limpidly brown eyes were mocking.

"Skal Doon," Kempton barked at him, "you'll answer for the ruthless murder of those innocent passengers!"

"But, my dear sir," the buccaneer protested, in his queerly thin voice, "those were my own men! Surely you cannot object!"

"Eh? The passengers——"

"—have not been injured, I assure you. They are safely confined to their quarters. I put my men through the valve as an act of mercy."

"You might explain." Kempton menaced him with an ionic needle.

Doon smiled again, twistedly, and shrilled:

"You seem to have understood my plan, captain, to fall in a parabola about the Dead Star."

"Yes. A simple trick."

"When I saw you follow, captain, I realized that you understood. And with the ship on your cable, I realized that I had lost the game. I was forced to select another means of escape. Accordingly, some distance back, I changed the course of the *Bellatrix.*"

"What?" Kempton demanded. "What did you do?"

"You'll find out, I fancy. And to prevent your undoing my work, I have also wrecked the motors, and short-circuited the generators in such a manner as to burn them out."

"But—but your escape——"

"You have already witnessed the escape of my men. I am now fol-

lowing them. But my deeds, you will find, are to live after me."

Doon's jaws contracted suddenly, and something crushed between his teeth. Still smiling, he spat blood and fragments of glass.

"Farewell, captain. And a safe voyage—to the Dead Star!"

He saluted ironically, and fell heavily upon his face.

IN A FEW mad minutes we verified all he had told us. The passengers were safely locked below. The machinery was wrecked beyond the possibility of repair. Hume and Kempton went to the liner's bridge.

The *Bellatrix,* they found, was plunging toward the Dead Star, upon a path that would end in flaming catastrophe. Doon, realizing his defeat, had turned the liner from the parabolic orbit toward that titanic black sun. Truly, his deeds lived after him.

One glance at the graviscope, or gravitational field detector, told Hume that doom was inevitable. Already the needle was pulled to the end of its scale. Even with the full power of her now useless motors, the ship could not have fought free of that relentless drag.

Tonia Andros, unharmed, came running across the deck when the imprisoned passengers were released. She found Gideon Clew and threw her arms around him. The old man bent and caressed her hair and looked into her dark, wistfully happy eyes.

Then Hume came back from the bridge, with the dread news that we were falling toward the Dead Star, helpless, doomed.

Gideon lifted the little girl in his arms and held her tight for a little time, and then set her down.

"Good-by, Tonia," he whispered. "There is something I forgot. I must go back on the station a little while. Captain Manners will take care of you. Run to him, now."

He pushed the grave-eyed, bewildered child away, and hurried toward the valve. Hume followed him, asked:

"You aren't going back on board, Clew? It's death. No air!"

The old man paused, and his sober blue eyes looked back at the puzzled, solemn child.

"Yeth," he lisped. "I must go. For *her!*"

He got back into his space suit, and Hume let him out.

The station's atmosphere was very thin when Gideon Clew returned—and cold. It glittered in the pale yellow tube-light with a frigid, frosty glint. He could hear the sibilant whisper of it as it hissed out into the frozen void.

He left his space suit in the air lock. Its tube of compressed air would have lasted perhaps an hour longer, but his hands, in its clumsy gloves, could not do the delicate work he had set for them.

Less than an hour, without it, was left him. Already he was breathing hard, as he made his way into the forecastle, gasping painfully from the slight exertion of walking. And there was much to be done—fifty years' labor to be brought to completion.

Synthetic air was still hissing noisily from the cylinders, perhaps as fast as it was leaking from the hull. But the cylinders, in a few more minutes, would be empty. And the cold due to swift expansion of escaping air filled all the ship; the chill of it seared Gideon's gasping lungs.

For a little time he stood, panting, shivering, among the complex apparatus in his own tiny cabin, his laboring heart thumping against his

throat. He felt tears come into his eyes at sight of these familiar instruments. Offspring of laborious years, they seemed living, intimate. He did not matter. But the Dead Star should not have his invention. Nor Tonia!

With trembling hands, he began the task. He first removed the tall vacuum tube from its mountings, and broke its air seal. When the room's frigid air had hissed thinly into it, he unscrewed the base, to examine the damage done when the tube had burned out.

The fine wires of the secondary electrode were fused in silvery beads against the cathode grid. He turned the delicate parts in his quivering, gnarled old hands, and studied them, trying to puzzle out the original defect that had caused the disaster. He searched patiently.

Even as he stood still, he had to gasp for breath. His head throbbed. The utter, unthinkable cold of space crept inexorably into the room; frost danced in the air. Gideon Clew shivered and absently drew his thin jacket closer about his erect old shoulders. One old man, he was pitted against the searching cold and the vacuum of elemental space—against the relentless gravitation of the Dead Star. But he took no time for despair.

At length he saw the defect. The filament should have been longer, the grid set back a little, and turned *so*. A simple change.

He found a coil of tiny wire and delicate tools, and began to make the repair. That was not difficult. The hard part would be to evacuate the tube again. It was useless with air inside, and he had no pump, or time to use it.

The new parts fitted, he screwed the base back into the tube and then attacked the problem of exhausting it. He knew a way, difficult, perilous—but quick.

As rapidly as he could, with numb, aching hands, he sealed a piece of metal tubing into the tube. Then he found his rotary drill, fitted it with his longest point, and attacked the cabin's outside wall.

That wall was the beryllo-steel hull of the station. Beyond its four obdurate inches was the vacuum he needed. Trembling, he leaned on the handle of the tool. Cold was piercing into him. His head ached; his ears drummed. Blood began to drip from his nose, drop by crimson drop, to freeze on the floor.

He reeled dizzily, but clung to his task. The drill whirred in his hands, quivered, bit slowly into tough metal. Its motor made a little heat, grateful to his stiffened fingers; he tried to hold them closer against it.

At last the point slipped through. He drew it back, and the air whistled shrilly through the hole, out into the void of space. Just as he had planned. He fitted the end of the metal tubing into it, crudely cemented it. Now the vacuum of space would draw the air from the repaired electron tube.

He closed the switches, and started to the generator room.

The hissing in the corridors had ceased. The air-cylinders were empty. Again the pressure in the ship was dropping, and swiftly.

Gideon's old heart labored so that he held a numb hand against it. He was suffocating; the thin, cold air seemed to be sucked out of his pumping lungs. His head roared and throbbed; his pulse drummed in his ears. Blood was still oozing from his nostrils, cold and sticky on his face.

And his body was wooden. Every movement was a battle against

leaden inertia. Every effort burned vital oxygen, increased the strain on heart and lungs. But he *must* go on —start the generators.

Now on hands and knees, he crawled along the corridor. His hands were stiff, lifeless things. No sensation came from them as they fell upon the metal floor.

No longer could he see. Blackness crowded upon him, lit with strange, lurid flashes of crimson. His head whirled; he felt that the ship was swinging, spinning, under him. A blind automaton, he crawled on. And the face of Tonia Andros danced before him, smooth and childish, dark eyes wistfully solemn.

Every tissue of his leaden, tortured body screamed at him: *"Stop! Stop! Rest! Forget!*

So he came at last into the generator room. With infinite effort he pulled himself up against the instrument board. There he leaned, gasping, trembling, blood trickling from his nose—straining every atom of his will to *see!*

The darkness at last cleared for a moment, and the roaring quieted in his head. He read the dials, and with stiff hands moved the switches. All the processes were familiar, automatic. If only he could hold himself up to carry them out!

He grasped the final lever with dead, insensate paws, and drew it down as he fell.

The old man lay gasping upon the floor, blood gushing from his nostrils in a scarlet, frothy flood—but he heard the soft *whir* of the generators, the shrill, rising whine of transformers.

ALL OF US were silent for a time, upon the *Bellatrix,* when Hume told us that Gideon Clew had gone back. We were all thinking of his cheery old face, with its red cheeks and its round, sober blue eyes. Of his faith, his optimism. And all of us were sorry we would never hear his lisping voice again.

But our minds were soon feverishly back upon more immediate things.

"After all, it's rather a splendid way to die," Vance told Hume. But his voice was unsteady.

They had gone back together to the bridge, and from its vitrolar panels stood watching the incandescent wonder of the nebula, the Dead Star grasped in its fiery tentacles, a growing black disk, splotched with red.

The battered, oxide-reddened hull of the station was drifting alongside at the end of her cable, her dark ellipsoid outlined against the green-tinged, flaming vortexes of the nebula. Hume looked at it.

"Perhaps," he said, with slow deliberation. "But old Clew—— Going back to work with his machine, till the end——"

Vance did not reply, and they gazed out upon the supernal majesty that infolded them. The Great Nebula: angry, swirling masses of virescent fire, white curtains and streamers and sheets, greenish, dazzling, clotted condensations. Cosmic clouds of flame, shrouding a grim, lifeless sun. The Dead Star: ominous black disk against lucent glory. Its lurid crimson spots—seas of molten lava, wide enough to swallow planets—stared back like red, evil eyes.

Vance laughed hollowly, nervously. He whispered: *"When?"*

Hume turned, found an astro-sextant on the chart table. He put it to his eye and read the apparent diameter of the Dead Star, and busied himself with his pocket calculator.

"Five hours——"

Vance said nothing, and they

watched the menacing, red-spotted blackness of the Dead Star's face. It was minutes later that he licked his lips and added:

"The acceleration increases, of course, as we fall nearer. Just above the surface, the force upon us will be upward of a ton for every pound of our bodies. We will have no sensation of it, though, because we are falling with it, free. And we aren't heading directly for the center of the disk. Momentum will carry us part-way around. We'll strike on the other side——"

A long silence, and Vance spoke again.

"Old Clew's gravity-screen! No wonder he went daft on it, looking down in the Dead Star for fifty years. And no doubt dreaming of something like this."

He laughed, loudly, mirthlessly.

Kempton gathered the nervous, bewildered passengers into the main saloon, and spoke to them.

"We are falling into the Dead Star," he said. "Nothing in the universe can save us. Nothing short of a breach of the law of gravitation. But the end will not be painful. We will flash instantaneously into incandescent gas. I advise you to get the most you can out of the few hours left to us. The whole ship is at your disposal. I will welcome any plans for diversion.

"But if any of you should feel that you cannot endure the strain of waiting, you will find the ship's surgeon ready in the sick bay with painless anæsthetics."

He stopped, with a gesture to indicate that he was done. The passengers milled about, white-faced, and stared unknowingly at each other, as if they had all been strangers.

Tonia Andros was going about the decks, asking in a bewildered and fearful voice where Gideon was, and why he didn't come back. Kempton found her and brought her with him to the bridge. Through the transparent panels she saw the Dead Star, a black, red-pocked disk, ever increasing, hung against curtains of supernal light.

She shuddered, drew back.

"It's like a face!" she cried. "With red eyes, gloating——"

And with anxious solemnity she demanded of Hume: "Where is my Granddad?"

The mate pointed to the station—a battered, twisted mass against the flaming arms of the nebula.

"Let's go across!" she cried, with big-eyed, wistful earnestness. "I want to find my Granddad!"

Hume shook his head. "It's no use, Tonia. The air was leaking out. He won't come back. He's—gone, now."

The mate averted his eyes, and the little girl still stared bewilderedly into the vitrolar panels.

"Look!" she cried out. "The green light! What is it? Do you see it? There! There!"

Then Hume saw a pale, virescent glow spreading swiftly over the battered red hull, like a film of oil upon water. Green luminescence streamed down the cable to the *Bellatrix;* in an instant it was shining upon the metal frames of the vision panels.

Then a bell clanged from the graviscope, and he ran back to it. He saw that the needle, that a moment before had been drawn to the end of its scale by the terrific pull of the Dead Star, had returned to zero. In unbelieving wonder, he stared at the instrument. Then he spun upon Kempton, eagerly.

"The old man was trying to generate an ionic screen that would reflect the radiation of gravity. That green glow is his screen—I know it

is! And the graviscope shows that we have been cut out of all gravitational fields!"

"And I," Kempton muttered, "I thought—just an old fool——"

"Don't you see what it means?" Hume cried in sudden, feverish eagerness. "We aren't going directly toward the Dead Star, and now it can't curve our path any more! We'll fly on past! We'll have time to make repairs, or photophone for aid!"

Tonia Andros was staring at him with round, wide eyes.

"Then Granddad is still all right?" she cried. "Let's go across and find him!"

She snatched Kempton's hand, tugged toward the door.

"Yes, he's all right," he whispered. "And, yes—we'll go——"

Preparedness

It is well known that France has been at work for years upon an immense underground fortification along her eastern frontier. The first definite word has just come from there.

An uninterrupted series of subterranean vaults of steel, iron and cement form one vast city one hundred kilometers in length. Thousands of cubic meters of earth cover it—leaving it at mine depth, with occasional vaults for the mouths of cannon.

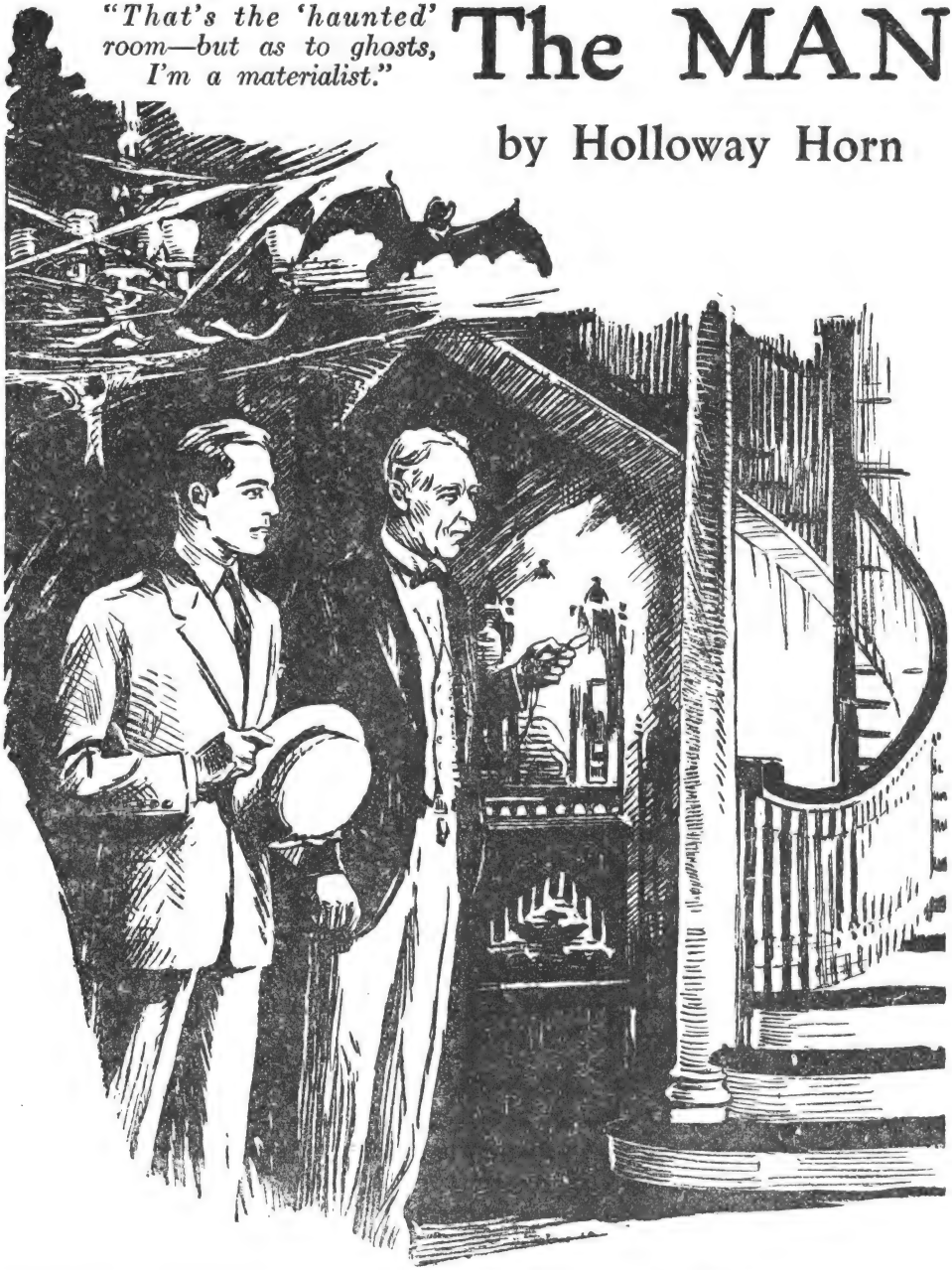
There are brilliantly lighted avenues—speedy and fairly comfortable trains for transportation. Entire armies could exist in this underground citadel for months at a time.

There are reports of a hidden abyss for the destruction of invading forces, of dams which might unleash thousands of tons of water over the surrounding countryside. France is preparing for any invasion that may come.

"That's the 'haunted' room—but as to ghosts, I'm a materialist."

The MAN

by Holloway Horn



THE SETTING was perfect. In the foreground the branches of a cedar tree swept the velvet lawn; behind it, mellowed by the centuries, stood the Elizabethan mansion which had sheltered the Balcombes for generations.

The eleventh baronet slept peacefully in a swing chair in the cool shadow of the tree, his white head bowed down.

from CINCINNATI

And his strangely unexpected visit to the haunted castle.

Suddenly he stirred in his sleep and opened his eyes with the consciousness that he was not alone. Blinking, and a little irritable, he sat upright and saw that a stranger was standing a few yards away from him, gravely contemplating the house.

Neither spoke for perhaps half a minute, when the stranger, observing that Sir John was awake, said, "I trust I did not disturb you, sir?"

"Not at all," said the baronet courteously.

"As a matter of fact, I only noticed you, Sir John, a moment or so ago," the other went on affably. "I am an American—John Saunders, of Cincinnati."

"Indeed?" Sir John replied, and sat upright.

"And I'm afraid I'm trespassing in your park," the American went on with a smile. "But I'm interested in Balcombe. Years ago my ancestors came from this part of England, you see."

"Saunders? The name is still about here," Sir John said. He was now wide awake and watching the stranger curiously. He had a vague feeling that he had seen him before.

"I was on my way to the Hall to ask permission to look over it," the American volunteered. He was entirely at his ease.

"Wednesday is usually the day," the baronet pointed out. "But I shall be happy to let you look round, seeing that you have come so far."

"Old mansions are fascinating, particularly to one from my part of the world, where most things are new, Sir John."

"You know my name?"

"Of course."

"You might as well sit down," said Sir John in a friendlier tone. The stranger had a pleasing manner and was quite unlike his idea of an American. His accent did not jar—indeed, it was rather attractive—and he seemed to be deeply interested in the old house. Somehow, the old man felt drawn to him.

"You were saying your ancestors lived in Balcombe?" Sir John asked.

"Yes. There's a gravestone in the churchyard I reckon to be that of my great-grandfather—Ephraim Saunders, of this parish."

"The vicar's a good fellow. He has all the parish records, and I'm sure he'd turn them up for you," the baronet suggested.

"Thank you," the American smiled. "If I have time, I will call on him."

"Personally, I haven't a great deal of use for the cloth," Sir John said confidentially. "I'm a materialist, I'm afraid. But they are part of the tradition down here."

"You surprise me, sir. I confess I've always associated the English landed gentry with the church."

"Even so—the trend of modern thought, I'm afraid, is to make one more critical than of old."

"Quite."

"But I'm keeping you talking, and you want to look at the Hall. Come along! I'll take you round myself. Jevons, the butler, usually gets it all mixed up, anyway."

"That's very good of you, sir. I shall be very much obliged."

Halfway up the broad staircase, Sir John touched a secret panel and revealed with dramatic suddenness a long, narrow corridor ending in darkness. The American started.

"The haunted room!" laughed Sir John. "Shall we go down to it?"

"Sure!" Saunders replied. "I'll always try anything once."

The corridor led to an oak door, black with age, which opened into a small, square, unfurnished room, conveying an immediate impression of eeriness.

"That's all there is to it," Sir John pointed out. "Legends galore, of course. Skeletons and what not, and clanking chains in the small hours. I'm always comfortably asleep by that time, however. Personally, I don't believe a word of it."

"If this room could speak——" the American said in a quiet voice, as if he had not heard what his host had said. "It's a strange thing, Sir John, but in my country, thousands of miles away from here, I'm almost certain that I have heard, from my own father, one of the legends of this very room.

"Is that so?" The baronet was obviously surprised.

"Some distant ancestor of mine had a daughter, and she is supposed to have been held prisoner in a secret room in this house."

"By one of *my* ruffianly ancestors?" Sir John asked with a frankly incredulous smile. "Do you mean that you—a modern American from Cincinnati!—claim a share in my ghost?"

Saunders smiled. "You evidently don't attach any importance to the legend at all, Sir John."

"Not a penny's worth! This room is rather stuffy, don't you think? Come—I'll show you some of the pictures. There are legends clustering around some of them, of course."

By the time Sir John Balcombe and the citizen of Cincinnati emerged from the impressive dimness of the Elizabethan hall into the garish sunlight of the lawn, there was an understanding between them. Sir John *liked* the American. There was a freshness about him, a naïveté. He appeared to be far more impressed with the legends of the Hall than was its owner.

"It's one of the loveliest places I've seen, Sir John," he said enthusiastically.

"You'd like to take it to America? I've read that it's sometimes done," his host said with a laugh.

The American shook his head. "You can't move a home, Sir John. It doesn't consist merely of bricks and mortar. Besides, what would your ghost do? I really cannot imagine an English one happy in—say—Cincinnati!"

"*Our* ghost!" Sir John corrected him. "But, as a matter of fact, if one attaches any importance to the legends, there are many ghosts at Balcombe."

"Oh? I'm terribly interested—I'm afraid you're not?"

"Frankly, I'm not. I'm a materialist, as I told you. I don't think there's a word of truth in any of the stories. Curiously enough, my wife does. I'm sorry she's not in; I'm sure she would have told you about them and, moreover, enjoyed doing so. One of the stories, even more absurd than the others, is to the effect that a certain ghost appears to the head of the house before he dies. It is like a thousand other legends in a thousand similar places, but our specimen has one peculiarity. The ghost never appears in the same guise twice. And always it is

what one might call a contemporary ghost. As I told you, I think the whole story is so much moonshine."

"It is a pity you are a materialist; these legends are simply wasted on you!"

Sir John smiled indulgently. The American was really a pleasant fellow. He appeared to have the credulous innocence of a child, and to be unlike everything Sir John had ever read of his race.

"It's a pity my wife isn't here," Sir John said again. "She knows the whole story. Once, I remember, the ghost was a postilion—that would be before the railways, of course. And another time it took the form of a white-haired lawyer. That was in my grandfather's days. The old gentleman—my grandfather, I mean, not the lawyer—told them on his deathbed that the lawyer had been with him all the afternoon. What had happened, of course, was that my grandfather had dreamed about the lawyer. But it was enough for the credulous people to seize on it and say: 'There you are! The ghost!' And that night he died. It is obvious, of course, that he would have died anyway."

"No one else saw the lawyer?" the American asked.

"No. But, if people want to believe in a ghost, a detail like that doesn't stop them."

"It's hardly fair on the ghost for you to tell his story," the American said, with a smile. "You don't give him a chance, Sir John. You could have made the story sound far more convincing."

"I told you I thought it all moonshine. When it appears to me, I'll believe it. I'm not prejudiced, really; but, until something happens which I, personally, can test, I'm afraid I'm an unbeliever."

"And you have never seen it?"

"No. I've heard all sorts of queer noises in the house at night, but you can't live in a place like this without noises. I'm quite certain that every one of them admits of some simple, natural explanation."

"It's a lovely old place," the American said quietly. He looked up at the mellow red front, the quaint windows. Perhaps he was envious, for he seemed almost to sigh as he turned to his host. "And now I must be going, Sir John. I thank you for your kindness in receiving me. I shall take away the happiest memories of Balcombe."

"Not at all. Good-by—good-by!"

An hour later, Lady Balcombe, dignified and austere, returned from a round of visits.

Jevons, the butler, stood within the shadow of the hall as she entered. He had been with the family for forty years.

"My lady!" he said as his mistress came up the broad steps.

"Yes, Jevons?"

"You will forgive me—but Sir John has not been himself this afternoon."

"What do you mean, Jevons?" she asked in surprise.

"He's been acting very queer, my lady. Walking all over the house talking to himself."

Lady Balcombe glanced sharply at the butler, but remained silent.

"He was talking just as if there was some one with him, my lady."

"And he was alone?" she asked in her quiet voice.

"Yes."

She breathed deeply.

"Where is your master? I will go to him."

They found Sir John where he would have wished to be found—underneath the old cedar tree, sheltered from the sun.

Above them, the heavens were filled with a savage glory.

A Story of the Second Dimension by

WALLACE WEST

I CAN'T understand it," said Doctor Adolph Strauss, nervously polishing the eyepiece of the five-inch telescope which he had set up in the garden behind his little drug store. "Yesterday I saw that comet. Yerkes and Flagstaff observatories corroborated my discovery. The New York papers gave the story half a column with my picture. To-night the comet isn't in sight!"

"Poor dad," said his son Frank, who was lying on his back in the grass, staring up at the darkening

PLANE PEOPLE

The razor-edged planet hurled itself at the Earth like a buzz saw.

sky. "I can see to-morrow's headlines: 'Amateur astronomer's comet a hoax.' 'Doctor Strauss's discovery discredited.' Ouch!"

"It's no laughing matter!" The rotund physician whirled upon his progeny. "If I've been mistaken, the president of the Amateur Astronomical Association will——"

"Yeh, I know." Frank rose lazily to his six feet two and yawned. "The A. A. A. will brand you for a publicity-seeking bungler. Well, guess it's time to relieve Marie at the soda fountain. I sure will be glad when this lousy vacation is over and I can start football practice."

Behind the counter was Marie, a pretty girl despite her too-tight dress and ridiculous spike-heeled shoes. Soft golden hair and clear blue eyes set off a pert, tip-tilted nose.

"'Lo, Frank." She relinquished her post behind the faucets. "I'll be back for the eight-o'clock rush. Don't work too hard."

Frank went into the back room to gossip with Bert Wheeler, the prescription clerk, a lean, pale youth who nourished ambitions of becoming a physician and marrying Marie. The two were soon deep in a discussion of end runs and interference, when the front door slammed violently.

"Frank! Bert!" Marie called. "There's something enormous in the sky! Come out, quick!"

At the same moment Doctor Strauss, flushed and shaken, thrust his head in the back door.

"I was right, after all! The comet! It's right on us! Coming at terrific speed! And it's flat—like a pancake! That's why I couldn't see it." The head vanished.

"The governor's gone nutty this time sure," said Frank. "He's going to have a comet named after him if he has to manufacture the darned thing."

Outside, however, Frank's handsome face went white at the amazing spectacle. From horizon to zenith, the eastern sky was split by a brilliant white line. As he stared, this vanished, to reappear as an elongated oval. Then it thinned to a hair line once more.

"What is it, dad?" he asked.

"Don't know. It's like a pie plate, big as the Earth. What we see is its wabbling edge. It's coming straight at us. The collision will split the Earth like an apple." He turned back to the telescope.

"Oh, God," Frank heard the old man praying, "in this, my last moment——"

The words were drowned by a hiss similar to that heard when a whip is cracked. This grew to a million whips, then transcended sound altogether. The line of light flashed downward like the edge of a sword!

FRANK RECOVERED consciousness and sat up holding his aching head. His whole body shook, as though he held the terminals of an electric vibrator. For a moment he thought he was still in the garden. There was the telescope, sprawling by its fallen tripod. Beside it, Doctor Strauss was lying,

his open mouth and unconscious, staring eyes revealed in the moonlight. A little distance away, Marie had crumpled up, her silk dress in tatters. Near her Bert sprawled like a fallen scarecrow.

But there was something wrong! The fence surrounding the garden was in ruins, while of the houses which should have bordered the street outside there was not a trace. Turning, he looked toward the drug store, to find it converted into a heap of tangled lumber, as though it had been struck by a giant hammer.

And there was something wrong with the moonlight which revealed all this. It was of a peculiar greenish blue, which caused Frank to lift his eyes. With a bound that would have done him credit on the gridiron, he then came to his feet with a shout of pure panic. The green light was coming, not from any Moon he knew, but from a great globe which spun across the heavens like an airplane.

"Dad! Bert! Marie!" he yelled, his heart thumping with terror. "Wake up! There's something wrong with the Moon!"

Then the awful thought occurred to him that perhaps the others were dead. An icy hand seemed to close around his heart. It relaxed, however, when the doctor stirred, sat up, rubbed his eyes, stared at the strange sky, then scrambled toward his beloved telescope.

For a long moment there was dead silence while Frank rummaged through his pockets for cigarettes and found none. Finally his father turned to him with a face suddenly drawn and wan.

"That's not the Moon, Frank. That's the Earth!"

"What's it mean, dad?"

Frank had unearthed a single crumpled fag from an inside pocket and was lighting it with trembling fingers.

"It means that we've been carried off on Strauss's comet." The little man could not resist giving their strange habitation his own name. "It probably impinged only slightly on the Earth, scooping us off as you would take a cherry off the top of a sundae with a spoon."

Frank started to walk across to the two other forms, only to discover that his progress was slow and clumsy, as though he were climbing a steep hill. Yet the ground was perfectly flat—flatter than he had imagined ground could be—and covered so far as the eye could reach with a dense, lichenous vegetation into which his feet sank as into a Persian rug.

Bert's thin frame and sallow face looked even more ineffectual than usual under the green Earthlight. Frank leaned over and shook him half contemptuously. Poor devil, what a shock he'd get! As the pharmacist moaned and showed signs of recovering, Frank turned his attention to Marie.

Without the mask of pertness behind which she always had hidden, the girl was much more charming than he had ever seen her. Her red lips were parted, showing fine white teeth. One rounded shoulder gleamed provocatively through her torn dress. Even in the relaxation of unconsciousness her figure showed long, graceful lines.

"Oh, how funny and green you look!" Marie had opened her eyes and was struggling to sit up, realizing her half-naked condition. "What hit us? I feel as if I'd been through a washing machine. Got a cigarette? I need one badly."

"Only this one. Have a whiff. It probably will be your last." He regretfully relinquished the butt.

"We're off on a comet, à la Jules Verne. The governor wasn't so crazy, after all. Can you stand up?"

"Oh, yes." She seemed unable to grasp the astounding news as yet. "Hello, Bert. You look as though you'd been dragged by a horse."

But Bert was far beyond caring how he looked. He alone seemed aware of the hopelessness of their position. His lips were blue. His eyes rolled wildly.

"What have I done?" he moaned. "What have I done? I'm going to die, and I don't want to." He began to laugh hysterically until Frank shook him back into sanity.

"Who says we're going to die? Buck up, old man. Let's go talk to the governor. Come on, Marie."

Frank held out his hand and thrilled to the firm, cool touch of hers as he assisted her to rise.

Their return to the doctor was another surprise. Although it looked level, the ground now seemed to slant sharply. They were forced to fight against the tendency to break into a run and only stopped beside the doctor by digging their heels into the turf.

"Say, what *is* this?" demanded Frank, sitting down because it seemed easier than standing against that invisible pull.

"I don't know, boy." Then, a speculative light in his nearsighted blue eyes, his father added: "When I was at the fairs they had a big wheel which spun round and round. You got on the wheel, and if you stayed near the center you could hold on. But if you slipped to the edge, off you went. Well, this comet is very thin and perfectly flat, like a phonograph record. It's whirling at a terrific rate, as you can see by the spiral motion of the Earth up there. Centrifugal force accounts for its being easy to walk in one direction and hard in another."

"Which is all perfectly lovely," countered Marie, "but what I want to know is, how and when do we eat?"

"All you think of is eating," Bert interrupted. "Now you've made me hungry."

"This grass has berries on it," said Frank. He picked a handful of a waxen fruit. "Hm-m-m! Don't taste bad."

"They may poison us," Marie suggested.

"Now, see here." Bert looked as if he were going to be ill. "That's no way to talk. Kidding's all right at the store—but this is serious!"

"Scaredy cat," Marie sniffed as she watched Frank still eating, and followed his example.

The pharmic glared at her and muttered under his breath. His dormant jealousy was awakening rapidly.

"What do we do next?" asked Frank after a long silence.

"I don't know," confessed the doctor, his head in his hands. "It's outside my experience. And it's going to rain soon, too," he added, staring at a low bank of mist or cloud which was sweeping over the ground toward them from what they considered the axis or "up" side of the country. "We ought to find shelter, I suppose."

"Let's start walking 'up' then. Better bring the telescope along. You can carry the tripod and Bert can bring the tube."

"Hey, how about you carrying something?" Bert protested. "And who gave you the right to issue orders, anyway?"

"Well, somebody had to take charge."

"How about consulting me—us—first? We ought to draw lots.

That's the way they do in desert-island stories."

"Sometimes they fight it out for the leadership. Want to do that?" Frank's voice was cold.

"Aw, say, now, I'm no fighter."

"All right, then." Frank slipped one hand under Marie's arm and lifted her to her feet. The pharmic choked with rage, but made no further protest.

"But wouldn't it be much easier to walk 'down'?" objected the girl after a few minute's laborious trudging against the centrifugal pull and the wind.

"Sure," replied Frank. "But, if dad's theory is correct, the farther 'down' we go, the easier the going will get until we'll be running and can't stop and are swept right off the edge of the planet like a spark from an emery wheel. No. We'd better go 'up.' The pull should become less as we advance."

The clouds were pouring toward them in a tumbled mass, and after half an hour's travel the rain commenced. But it was like no rain they knew. Instead, it resembled a barrage of machine-gun bullets flying almost parallel to the ground, and was accompanied by a gale which stopped their progress like an outthrust hand.

Marie whimpered but struggled valiantly on, her tiny spike heels sinking into the tundra, her permanent wave only a memory. Frank looked at her with a new respect and growing admiration and tried to aid her as best he could.

Bert was the first to quit the unequal struggle. Dropping the telescope, he lay on his face behind that slight shelter and cursed savagely.

Since no rock or hill offered shelter on the mist-enshrouded plain, Frank also stopped, directed his father to sit with his back to the rain, slumped down beside him, and pushed Marie into the shelter formed by their bodies. On Earth the girl would have been unprotected from the rain, but here, because of its almost horizontal path, she was fairly dry. The back of her protectors ached with the smart of the lashing drops, while little rivulets flowed from behind them and trickled down on the drug clerk.

"How long do you think we can hold out?" Frank whispered to his father as soon as he saw that Marie, completely exhausted, had fallen asleep.

"Two or three days, unless we can find shelter or light a fire."

"Say, dad"—the youth found his parent's wrinkled hand and squeezed it gently—"I've treated you pretty badly at times, and I'm sorry. You're a good scout."

"Let's forget it, then." The old man's voice quavered. "I was too old when you were born to understand you, I'm afraid.

HOURS LATER, as the green Earth was plunging over the edge of the planet, the Sun rose over the other rim and started a rapid spiral toward the zenith. Miraculously the rain stopped, the crawling clouds evaporated, and the wind died away.

Dripping and exhausted, the four started forlornly about them over the unbroken plain. Marie had awakened with a violent chill, while the doctor had developed a hacking cough.

"We've got to have a fire," announced Frank. "Who's got a match? Mine are all gone."

The doctor produced a few sticks from which the heads had melted.

Bert rummaged through his pockets, but fared no better.

Frank looked inquiringly at Marie.

"Where do you think I'd carry a match in this rig?" she laughed, hugging her knees and trying to still her chattering teeth. "I'm as naked as the girls on the lipstick calendars," she added, to show that she had not lost courage.

"How about the telescope lens as a sunglass, then? This moss is drying out rapidly."

Chagrined that he had not thought of this before, the doctor unscrewed the glass. Only a few minutes were required to create a tiny blaze, around which they dried themselves and regained some of their spirits.

"All right; let's go." Frank realized that to sit still meant death in this barren land. Marie clung to his arm, laughed at all his jokes, and did not try to hide the look of adoration in her eyes.

Although only two hours had passed, the Sun had reached the zenith, and the heat had grown oppressive when they came across a path in the tundra which made the going somewhat easier. This track was narrow, but it ran in the direction they were taking and proved a godsend for Marie, whose pretty shoes had become mere pulpy masses.

"At least, there is some sort of animal life in this strange world," the doctor said. "Maybe we won't starve, after all."

Hardly had he spoken when Frank motioned him to be quiet.

"Food in sight. Some kind of creature up ahead."

Deploying to right and left, they crept forward. Soon a bright-green object could be plainly seen coming down the path. Frank gripped the tripod, their only weapon, and crouched, hoping the peculiar thing would not see him. The more they advanced, the more extraordinary their prey appeared. Seen close at hand, it resembled a gigantic sole or flounder, being flat as a pancake and evidently propelling itself by extending and retracting its under side. In the head portion were two narrow eyes and a wide mouth which worked continuously. The thing plainly was endeavoring to escape from some pursuit, and took no notice of its new peril. It was on the point of scrambling past the humans when Frank swung his tripod. It took two blows to dispatch the creature, and between the first and second it set up a shocking squeal which set their teeth on edge. It was almost human.

"Get out the glass, dad. We'll have dinner right now." Frank held up the "catch," which looked exactly like a dusty fish.

Their preparations were interrupted, however, by a peculiar, high-pitched humming which increased rapidly from the direction which they had agreed to call "up the hill."

"More of them," reported Frank, shading his eyes from the Sun. "Might as well lay up a supply for the winter."

But the creatures which now came scooting down the path were of an arrestingly different nature from the fish they had just killed. Bert took one look at them and beat a hasty retreat. Even Frank paled as he motioned Marie and his father to stand behind him and poised the tripod for action.

The newcomers were about six feet long and two broad, and were equipped with innumerable arms or legs which extended from their spiny sides like those of centipedes. But the most amazing thing about the creatures was that, for all their length and width, they could not have been more than an inch or two thick. In fact, they looked like dreadful animated ribbons on the

dusty path as they shot along at race-horse speed.

It was their heads, however, which bothered Frank most. Somehow, they looked weirdly human, as though the skull of a man had been run intact through a clothes wringer. The flattened eyes were there, the protruding nose and square chin, coasting only a fraction of an inch above the ground. And the creatures were spaced evenly along the track, as though in some intelligent formation.

"They give me the jitters," whispered Marie, who stood her ground, determined to shame Bert for his cowardly retreat. "That first one looks like Lee Wong, the laundryman."

"Shut up!" Frank realized their grave danger only too well. "They may hear us. Don't move. They're watching the path and may not see us."

For a few seconds it did look as though they would escape, for the flat things paid no attention to them but swept down the path without hesitation until they came to the pool of blood where Frank had killed the "fish."

Here they stopped—there were five of them in all—and held what looked to be a hurried conference. They seemed to use long antennæ which sprouted from their faces like mustaches as some sort of a means of communication.

Coming out of their huddle, they began to explore the sides of the path while the humans held their breath in agonized stillness. One of the things at last came upon Bert's footprints and scuttled along them in pursuit.

The pharmic, who had stopped after running several hundred yards, saw his pursuer coming and let out a yell of terror as he began another sprint. He had not gone a hundred yards when he was overtaken. Frank saw him lift one foot to trample the hideous head into the ground. The next instant he screamed in agony as a sheet of red light shot along the ground toward him. An instant later he plunged sidewards into the moss.

"Frank! Help! They've done something to my feet! Come kill the damned thing! Ow! They're murdering me!" he wailed like a small child.

But Frank was unable to help. The remaining flat things at last had discovered him and his companions and surrounded them, as though waiting for a hostile move.

Tentatively Frank thrust the end of the tripod at one of them. A flash of flame burst from some instrument held in the forward claw of the one Marie had called "Lee Wong." The end of the tripod fused and melted away.

Frank's flesh crawled at the thought of the tortures which probably lay before them at the hands of these monstrous beings. The thought flashed through his mind that perhaps it would be wisest to slay Marie and the doctor with the tripod before they could be captured. Then his natural optimism revived, and he determined to meet the situation with a smile, no matter what the future might hold.

"Phew," he groaned, trying to be comic despite his dry throat. "Now what's to do? Mustn't monkey with these babies. They're poison. All right, old boy," he added, bowing to the one who appeared to be the leader. "What's next on your snaky highness's program?"

For answer the flame, much diminished in power, swung until it struck his right foot. Instantly the leather of his shoe became painfully

"They talk with their feelers. That lets us out."

"I'm not so sure of that. Let's wait and see."

Marie had been stumbling along on bare feet, around which she had wrapped strips from her tattered dress. At this point in the conversation, she stepped on a sharp stone and would have fallen had not Frank picked her up in his arms.

This action set their captors in a furor. They deployed right and left in search of the girl, and it was several minutes before they gave up the search and returned to prod the other captives onward. When Frank set the girl on her feet, a quarter of an hour later, the creatures again were thrown into a near panic and went into their customary huddle to discuss the matter.

"If we could climb a tree, they'd lose us completely," predicted the doctor. "As soon as we leave the ground, we cease to exist for them."

But there were no trees—only the endless plain.

THE SUN HAD spiraled across the sky twice, and the Earth and Moon, now diminished to pygmy dimensions by the onward flight of the comet, had followed it thrice, when they caught sight of a curious formation on the ground half a mile ahead.

Unquestionably it was a city, but a city such as they had never dreamed of. Along broad, radiating avenues were multitudes of what appeared to be open-topped, five-sided boxes. In and out of these, it could be seen as they approached, were moving thousands of the thin people, engaged in the pursuit of business and pleasure. The sides of these houses were only three or four inches high and painted in brilliant, contrasting colors. It was to be observed, also, that the edges of the inhabitants were of the same color as their houses. That is, a family of five or six red "thinsies," as Marie had now dubbed them, would inhabit a house of the same color, while near at hand a green house would be full of grass-tinted monstrosities.

"They paint their visible portions to aid in recognition," the doctor suggested. "You will notice that the tops of their bodies are a uniform dull white."

"They won't have to paint us." Marie still tried to maintain her flip attitude, although it was wearing rather thin in spots and allowing a very frightened little girl to peep through. "We'll join the red tribe. We're sunburned like tomatoes."

The arrival of the humans created a sensation in the town. Great crowds of the creatures gathered along the sides of the streets to watch their progress, and the shrill humming which seemed an attribute of all of them rose until it all but deafened the newcomers.

But, unlike human crowds, this one remained orderly and let Frank and his companions pass through a narrow lane in the midst of the thoroughfare.

Bert was in an ecstasy of terror as the thousands of long feelers brushed his feet. More than once Frank had to steady him as he stumbled and would have stepped into the midst of the throng.

"Easy, old man," he warned the pharmic, whose eyes flitted about continually, seeking some way of escape. "They've got our number. Buck up. We'll come out all right."

"I'll never get out of here alive." Bert's teeth were chattering. "If they'd only look up at us, maybe we'd have a chance. *Ow!* Take that devil off!" An impatient guard, an-

noyed at his hesitancy, had prodded his heel with the ray.

"Shut up, Bert," snapped Marie, whose nerves were stretched tight. "Why don't you act like a man? Frank's not afraid."

"Haven't time for that." Frank gripped Wheeler's trembling arm and yanked him forward as he saw signs of a disastrous panic. "Let's get out of here before we step on a few heads and get burned to death."

Straight through the city, which, except for its brilliant and barbaric coloring, presented a strangely depressing appearance, they were herded toward an immense polygonal structure in the mathematical center of the converging streets.

Here a conclave already was gathering to receive them. They perceived long lines of the thin creatures, most of them painted a brilliant yellow, pouring through the many doors and ranging themselves in well-spaced order inside.

"Might as well put on a show to impress them with our supernatural powers," said the doctor as they approached the walls of this building. "Remember that we present a totally different aspect to them when we sit down, lie down, place our hands on the ground, and so on. If we make enough changes, perhaps they'll decide that we are Old Men of the Sea and treat us with respect."

Suiting the action to the word, he stepped over the pygmy wall, and, followed by his companions, threaded his way between the rows of thunderstruck spectators until he reached a wide cleared space in the center of the building.

Their guards dashed wildly around the outside of the hall, as completely at a loss as an Earthly policeman would have been if his prisoner had walked *through* a brick wall.

Meanwhile, in the center of the auditorium, the humans were performing strange antics. In unison they kneeled down, rolled over, danced, stood on one leg, and performed similar feats, while a swelling hum of astonishment from the spectators told them that their efforts were creating a sensation.

When the assemblage was humming and hissing like a collection of dynamos, a squad of red-painted guards at last pushed their way to the center of the floor and leveled their weapons at the Earth men. Instantly the latter stood still. Apparently this was considered a sign of surrender. At any rate, the commotion diminished and the jammed exits were cleared.

At last, when perfect silence had been restored, a vermilion personage, surrounded by a heavy guard, hesitantly approached the captives. Tentatively it thrust out its two-foot-long feelers toward Bert. The boy kicked out and stumbled back in dismay. For a moment it looked as though the personage intended to order his guards to destroy them. Frank's tongue clove to the roof of his mouth and a cold sweat broke out on the palms of his hands.

Then the yellow leader turned its attention to Doctor Strauss, who had advanced and stood unflinchingly in front of the others. It must be understood that the doctor's thin shoes long ago had disintegrated until now his toes stuck through the leather and stared back at the thinsie which inspected them. After some hesitation, the creature rested its feelers upon the exposed digits.

A look of amazement was born and grew on the doctor's round face.

"It's talking to me!" he exclaimed. "Some sort of thought transference

which only becomes operative through physical contact. He's apologizing for the rudeness with which we were welcomed!"

A burst of hyterical laughter interrupted his explanation. Marie's control at last had snapped.

"Oh, the doctor's talking with his toes! Shake toes with the rulers of Thinland, doctor. They're just plane people. This is worse than 'Alice in Wonderland.'" Tears trickled from her eyes, and she at last was forced to sit down on the floor, where she rocked back and forth, to the vast astonishment of the concourse.

"This is no time for nonsense, Marie!" Strauss warned her sternly.

"Look! Look!" she choked. "That red fellow has placed his feelers on thinsie's tail, and the next guard has connected with him. See, all the creatures are in contact. They're listening in on your conversation, doctor. Don't tell any state secrets. Oh, Frank, make me stop laughing! I—I can't." She was crying now with dry, jerking sobs.

Realizing that she was going into a real fit of hysterics, Frank lifted the girl to her feet, shook her, gently at first and then more vigorously, until her teeth rattled and her sobs ceased.

When they glanced back at Strauss they observed that the old man's face was at once blank and tense, as though he were trying to talk for the first time with a mechanical larynx.

"Here, take hold of my hand, Frank. You, too, Bert and Marie," he commanded. "I want you to hear what's going on and maybe help me out in the pinches. This is all new. These people think so differently from us that even their thought waves sometimes mean nothing to me."

He extended his hand as he spoke. Frank grasped it, and gasped as a shock ran up his arm and through his whole being. Instantly he was in tune with the strangest conversation of his life.

"Most illustrious sir"—the words formed distinctly in Frank's brain, like smoke rising through wet leaves—"you will excuse my forwardness in touching you, but this arises not from an ignorance of the usages of polite society, but from your apparent inability to understand the spoken word. Your lordship is so peculiar in appearance—five ovals connected to a much larger oval—that before we enter into further communications, may I beg you to satisfy the curiosity of one who desires deeply to know when his visitor came and how he is able to change his shape at will?"

"I come from space, sir." The doctor's words came distinctly to his son, although the little astronomer's lips had not moved.

"Pardon me, my lord, but is not your lordship now in space as he converses with me, King Toko of Umenia, even at this moment?"

"Would your majesty be kind enough to define space?"

"My lord, space is length and breadth prolonged to infinity. Every one knows that."

"You are wrong, sir," Strauss answered. "You imagine space as having two dimensions only. I come from a land of three dimensions—height, breadth, and length."

The king was quiet for a long moment as though trying to digest this amazing information.

"Would your lordship condescend to explain in what position is his third dimension, height?"

"It is up above and down below."

"My lord means that it is toward

"Don't move! They can burn you to a cinder with those little tubes they have!"

and away from the center of Umenia?"

"Not in the least. I mean a direction in which you cannot look because your eyes are not made to look other than to the left and right. In order to perceive space you should have an eye on your upper side; that is, on what you would call your inside."

"An eye on my inside! You jest."

"Not so," replied the doctor, adopting the stately manner of the king's utterances. "I tell you I come from the land of three dimensions. I can look down upon the plane of Umenia and discern the inside of all you call solid. I can see that fifty guards are now patrolling the outside of this building. I can discern the contents of yonder strong box in which are stored many documents. Permit me to bring one of them to you."

A buzz of terrified astonishment greeted this announcement. This was intensified to a shrill scream

from the thousand onlookers as the doctor marched to the great box in the center of the amphitheater, lifted an inscribed tablet through its open top, and a moment later placed it before the king.

"Truly, you are a magician!" muttered the monarch.

"Not at all." The doctor now began to show his usual impatience. "You locked the box, but that did not prevent my reaching through its top—that which you call its inside—and bringing proof of my powers. This is due to the fact that you live upon a plane. What you style Umenia is a vast level surface upon which you and your countrymen move about without rising above it or falling below. My shape is not that of five ovals connected to a larger oval. That is only the edge of what I call my foot. In fact, I am not a plane figure but a solid, made up of an infinite number of circles, squares, and other geometric figures placed on top of one another. I am a creature called man. My name is Adolph Strauss."

"You talk in riddles, Adolphstrauss."

"Behind another proof, then," commanded the doctor. "I will lift my foot slowly. Order your guardsmen to hold it."

The king did so. Instantly six red thinsies leaped forward.

"We have him," they shouted. "No! Yes, we have him still! He's going! He's gone!" Their thin arms waved back and forth impotently as the doctor stood on one leg and winked at his fascinated son. Then, perceiving the other foot, they flung themselves upon it and shouted their victory as the king crawled up to make inspection.

"But this is not the same person!" said the baffled monarch. "Or, rather, it is as if he had turned himself inside out. See, the largest of the five small ovals is on the right side instead of the left."

"That is my other foot," the doctor explained. "I lifted the first foot into the third dimension. Now are you convinced?"

Poor King Toko was at his wit's end. He broke contact and conferred hastily with his sages. One of these, a decrepit creature with mathematical leanings, asked to take up the questioning.

"Tell me, Mr. Mathematician," resumed the doctor when the thought current had been restored, "if a point moves toward the center of Umenia, leaving a luminous wake, what name would you give to the wake that it would leave?"

"A straight line, of course," was the haughty reply.

"And if the straight line moved sidewise, parallel to itself, what name would you give the figure thereby formed?"

"A square."

"Now stretch your imagination a bit and conceive a square moving parallel to itself upward."

"What! Toward the planet's center?"

"No, no! Upward, out of Umenia altogether. I mean that every point in your—that is to say, in what you call your inside—is to pass upward through space in such a way that no point shall pass through the position previously occupied by any other point, but each point shall describe a straight line of its own."

"And what may be the nature of the figure which I am to shape?" the mathematician floundered.

"You will generate a solid, which will be bounded by six sides—that is to say, six of your insides. You see it all now, eh?"

But at that point the mathematician went violently insane and had

to be removed screaming from the hall.

The king, it developed, was no quitter. He once more took his place by the doctor's side and begged further enlightenment.

"Be thou juggler, enchanter, dream or devil, I will make yet another effort to comprehend the meaning of your lordship's words," he said. "Yet I must confess that I cannot grasp your reasoning."

"Why don't you lift him off the ground, dad?" Frank queried. "That should convince the damned idiot."

King Toko caught the meaning of this remark, although, luckily, not its disparaging tone, and shuddered throughout the yellow length of him.

"Lift me out of space?" he cried. "No, never. My people would not permit you to lay hands on my royal person."

"How about one of your councillors, then?" suggested Frank.

The king thought deeply for several minutes. Finally he replied:

"Very well. Lift Puro, my secretary of state. He is old and feeble, and if he dies there will be no great loss."

But the sage in question had no intention of being made the subject of any experiment. Wildly he scuttled toward an exit and was only captured as he was leaving the building.

Brought back, he hummed and shivered in a very nightmare of terror until a sharp command from the king silenced him. Then, like a lamb to the slaughter, he crept forward to his doom.

Overcoming his distaste for the creature, Frank gripped the ribbon-like sides and hoisted mightily. Puro was surprisingly light for his size and came away from the ground like a feather. For a moment his slit eyes closed, and Frank feared that he had died of fright. Then his eyes slitted open and his excited buzzing threw the whole auditorium into another uproar.

"Either this is madness or it is hell!" Frank caught the thought vibrations as the poor fellow squeezed his eyes shut once more.

"It is neither," said the doctor. "It is knowledge; it is three dimensions. Open your eyes again and tell what you see."

Slowly Puro complied. The hall was hushed as he began to speak.

"It is a new world!" he chattered. "I see the inside of this creature which has lifted me, yet I can see no heart, nor lungs, nor arteries, only a beautiful, harmonious something. I see a space that is not space. I see what I had considered my own inside, and yet it is not my inside. I see both the inside and outside of this amphitheater, even as the stranger has described it. I see the inside of the strong box. I see the interiors of houses in the city. Behold, I have become a god, I, Puro, whose death, O king, you just said was of little importance!"

"Set him down. He grows blasphemous," commanded Toko. "I believe! Strangers, you shall have the freedom of the city and shall teach me and my people the secrets of the thing you call space. A holiday shall be declared in your honor, and you shall want for nothing so long as you remain with us."

Frank did as he was bid, and old Puro, dazed by his experience, crept away to cogitate in one corner of the hall.

THEN BEGAN a period of existence which was like heaven to the castaways after the privations they had suffered while roaming the

plain. Their every wish was granted. They lived on the fat of the land—strange vegetables like flat beans and carrots, steaks from the fishlike creatures which the thinsies herded like cattle and which also provided a thick milk.

The doctor set up his battered telescope near the little hut which they had constructed near the palace and made endless calculations as to the speed and orbit of the comet on which they rode. He clung desperately to the hope that they sometime might return to Earth, but admitted frankly that there was not one chance in a billion of their doing so. In technical language hard for the others to understand, he explained that the comet, in colliding with the Earth, had been thrown into a parabolic orbit around the Sun which sometime might bring it back to a similar juxtaposition with its heavenly neighbor. He talked of paralaxes, relativity, and space time as glibly as though he understood all about them, and only Frank's caustic comments could bring him back to consideration of things nearer at hand.

Apparently there was little to support his theory. The Earth became smaller and smaller until it appeared only as a bright star with the Moon a tiny speck beside it. They approached the orbit of Venus until that planet grew to the size of a dinner plate and then receded as their wabbling "phonograph disk" swept into the outer reaches of space. But the spiraling Sun and the days and nights of four hours each continued unchanged. And every night the driving bulletlike rain lashed Umenia with a thousand whips, and every day the heat stifled them.

The king's sages came to them each day, and the doctor spent hours in trying to open up to them the vast reaches of three-dimensional existence. Marie and Frank joined in this work as best they could.

"Well, Marie," Frank asked one day after she had been explaining to the king himself methods of preparing food on Earth, "do you think you could teach the old boy to mix a cherry soda?"

"I might," she laughed, "if I could only make him understand what a faucet is. He's promised to send some of his metal workers so that we may show them how to make pipes and boxes and other 'high things,' as he calls them." She busied herself tidying her growing hair before the big lens from the telescope.

Lately Bert had started taking long, solitary walks outside the city walls to relieve his boredom and brood over his troubles. His excuse was that he did this because he hated the sight of the thinsies. Only that morning, however, Frank, on a jaunt of his own, had come upon the other in close conversation with Puro, the secretary of state who had been "elevated" at the auditorium.

"You don't seem to fear Puro much," he now remarked, recalling that strange sight.

"Aw, I was afraid the thing would burn me if I didn't talk." But his little eyes shifted back and forth.

Frank thought no more of this conversation until the next day, when he was starting across the city limits to examine a formation not far away which the doctor believed might contain gold.

When he reached the city wall, however, he found a squad of red quardsmen drawn up to block his progress. Their vicious-looking ray guns were held at ready, and they plainly meant business.

Bending down, he touched the

feelers of the commander and demanded an explanation.

"The king has issued an order that no humans are to be allowed outside of the city," was the sharp retort. "You must ask him the reason."

Furious, yet frightened by this unexpected shadow upon their idyllic existence, Frank hurried back to their house and reported the circumstance to his father.

The doctor's face went white as he listened.

"I can't understand it," he said. "Has this whole thing been a trick to lull us into security? Are these creatures really as heartless as they look? Come." He pulled on the tatters which remained of his coat. "We are lost if we accept this indignity without complaint. Let us go to Toko at once."

The king welcomed them in the throne room as though nothing had happened, but when they demanded an explanation he moved his feelers uncertainly, stammered and sputtered as though he were ashamed of what he had done, but refused to lift the embargo.

"But what have we done to deserve such an indignity?" shouted the doctor, forgetting that the monarch could only understand his thought waves.

If a Umenian shrug had been possible, Toko would have shrugged.

"It has been brought to my attention that you are planning to escape from my city," he said at last. "I find your instructions so invaluable that I do not intend to let you go. I have spoken." So saying, he removed his antennæ from the doctor's toe as an indication that the audience had ended.

"Well, what do you make of it?" Frank asked as they left the spacious pen which served Toko for a palace.

"Could it be that Bert was trying to run away when the secretary of state caught him?" the doctor asked. "I gave him credit for more sense than that. There's no place to escape where he would not starve to death in a week."

However, Bert violently denied that he had endeavored to escape. Rather unnecessarily he cursed Puro, and at the same time begged his companions to respect the king's orders to the letter.

"I tell you we'll all be burned," he whimpered. "I'm not going outside the house."

After this incident, life went on as usual, except that now a shadow of fear hung over them. Although the sages came for instruction as usual and treated them with stately courtesy, the humans felt that they were being toyed with and, when their usefulness had ceased or they had offended against the mysterious laws of the country, they would be put out of the way without compunction. At least, Marie, Frank, and his father were gripped by this unrelenting fear. Strangely enough, Bert, after a few days, broke his resolution of staying at home and once more started his roaming. He swore that he never left the city, even when he had a chance to evade the guards; but Frank once caught him cleaning his cracked shoes of what looked suspiciously like country mud.

"The days aren't so bad," Marie once remarked after a week of this harrowing existence. "Then we can see the creatures coming if they attack us. It's the nights that frighten me. Sometime when we're asleep they'll come slithering over the floor, and that will be the end of us."

"Nonsense!" Wheeler's courage caused them to cast surprised glances in his direction. "The flat-

landers never go out when it's raining. We're perfectly safe at night."

SUNLIGHT THAT FILTERED through the thatch awakened Frank early one morning. Bert already had gone out, but the doctor still snored heavily, worn out by his studies.

The boy arose from his hard moss bed, drew on what few clothes were left to him, and tapped lightly on the screen which divided Marie's room from that of the men.

There was no answer.

He knocked more loudly and called. Still no answer. His heart filled with a nameless fear, he pushed aside the rickety door and looked in, then gasped in amazement.

The moss of which Marie had made her bed was scattered all over the floor. The few articles which she had collected to adorn the walls were likewise in disarray. A great hole was torn in the flimsy outside wall, while a strip of fiber rope lay in the middle of the room. He stared around fearfully.

"Marie!" he shouted wildly, knowing there would be no answer. "Where are you?"

His heart beat heavily, and his fists doubled to meet he knew not what menace. Could it be that the thinsies, creeping silently in on their captives, had carried off Marie and Bert for some evil purpose and without waking the others?

But his love for the girl overcame his fear. He leaped through the opening in the wall, ready to battle to the death. Outside, he received another shock. On the ground which had been protected from the rain were the marks of footprints. They had been almost obliterated. Nevertheless, he recognized them as having been made by Bert's dilapidated narrow shoes.

He dashed back into the house and shook his father into wakefulness.

"Bert's kidnaped Marie! Quick, let's go after them. The sneaking little coward! I'll break every bone in his body this time, and you can't stop me."

"Why, that's ridiculous!" cried the doctor. "Where could he take her? The country is as flat as your hand."

Nevertheless, after examining the trampled grass, he had to admit that the Umenians had no part in the affair.

Frank was for starting after the pair at once, but his father pointed out that they probably had been captured at the outskirts of the city; or, if they had not, he and his son undoubtedly would be turned back, now that day had broken.

"We must report to the king at once. He'll send a squad of red guards after them and bring them back in an hour or so. The country is as flat as your hand, and there's no place to hide.

At the palace, however, their way was barred, an unusual procedure which fretted their nerves still further. Frank's mind was full of dreadful pictures of what might happen to Marie. He pictured her lost and starving in that untracked wilderness. But he bit his lips until they bled and refused to let his thoughts carry him farther.

After a delay of several minutes, a yellow-tinted official approached and made contact with the doctor in the approved ceremonial manner, apologized for the delay, and led them through a labyrinth of chambers to the audience hall.

There everything was in buzzing confusion. Purple messengers scrambled hither and yon; councillors were grouped about the king, their delicate antennæ in quivering

connection with his. For all the world it looked like a gigantic ant hill laid open.

Toko broke contact as the Earth men were ushered in and buzzed a command that they be allowed to approach.

"Most illustrious sir," his majesty's thoughts fell over each other into his visitors' minds after a new connection had been made, "thanks for your visit, but I fear I shall have little time for you this day. My kingdom is in an uproar. Puro and members of an apparently harmless youths' movement which he recently organized have revolted, and left the city. Half my army has mutinied and fled with them.

"They escaped, a thousand strong, in the midst of the storm last night. Just now I received a messenger from Puro advising me that he and his followers had gone to Treeka, which is a little town near the rim of the planet and the place where he was born. He added that the Strange Tribes had promised to join him in an attack upon this city unless I agreed to abdicate at once.

"There is the messenger." He waved a stumpy, jointed leg toward a pile of charred flesh in the middle of the hall. "That was my answer."

A horrible suspicion formed in Frank's mind. Could it be that Bert had joined hands with the former secretary of state?

The king screamed with excitement as he read this thought.

"Yes, O king," admitted Doctor Strauss. "The member of our party whom you call the 'Fearful One' also has fled, carrying with him the girl known to you as the 'Smooth One.' We know, also, that he held several conversations with Puro just before you forbade any of us to leave the city."

"Why did you not tell me this?" wailed Toko. "It was Puro who warned me that you were planning to escape. I see it all now. He had been plotting with the Fearful One and did not want you others to scent the plot. Oh, sir, I beg your pardon humbly for the injustice I have done you."

A new thought struck him. "Does this mean, illustrious sir, that the Fearful One will teach Puro's men to bring the terrors of your third dimension against us?" he quavered.

"I fear so, your majesty," answered the doctor. "The Fearful One knows much of chemistry and might not only make dreadful explosives but also machines to lift your enemies above you, where they could do great execution with their ray guns."

"This is the end of my reign, then," muttered Toko, his whole yellow body falling limp. "I must abdicate to save my people."

"You're wrong, old fellow," interrupted Frank, who had been holding his father's hand all this time and thus had been in tune with the whole conversation. "Why don't you put my father in charge of the defenses of Umenia? His wisdom is great."

The king's slit eyes brightened with hope. "Your son has inspired me with new hope, O illustrious sir!" he exclaimed. "It shall be as he suggests. You shall have Puro's place as secretary of state and teach my army, also, how to elevate themselves. Your son shall be minister of war."

"Not so fast," interrupted Frank. "My first duty is to the Smooth One. I'm going to rescue her. If I succeed and return, I shall be glad to accept your offer. Otherwise——" He shrugged his shoulders, then added: "If your majesty will be pleased to grant me a safe conduct out of the city, I will be going."

Toko scribbled a few lines on a tablet. Snatching this with a hurried word of thanks, Frank stooped and grabbed a ray gun from the claw of a near-by guard. Then he vaulted over the wall of the audience hall, dodged hurrying Umenians, reached the street, and raced back to the hut to make an effort to pick up Bert's trail.

Once there, he made a discovery of something which he had overlooked in his first excitement. Leading away from the hole in the wall of Marie's room was a faint trail of moss fragments. He surmised that the girl must have snatched a handful of this after Bert had bound and gagged her, and dropped it bit by bit to guide possible rescuers. She had pluck!

The trail did not last long, but was sufficient to give Frank an idea of the direction his rival had taken. This was straight toward the rim of the comet on the line of the least resistance; that is, on the radius of a circle.

Aided greatly now by the centrifugal force which had so hindered him in reaching the capital weeks before, Frank started along the dim trail in ten-foot leaps, praying that he might not be too late. At the city gate his passport let him through, and he plunged on into the open country.

Frank had not gone far before he saw on the wet grounds signs that Bert had had trouble in carrying his struggling burden. Marie was not exactly plump any more, due to the lack of candy and sodas and also because of the athletic outdoor life she led on the comet. But neither had she become a featherweight. Half a mile from town, he came upon dim tracks in the road which indicated that the kidnaper had set the girl on her feet, then forced her onward, probably at the point of a weapon.

The pursuer redoubled his speed in hope of overtaking them soon. He had passed the last straggling suburb and was in the open country now. The land on either side still was intensively cultivated, however, and grew the strange, flat vegetation of Umenia in luxuriant abundance. Now and then he saw a farmer crawling about the fields.

Despite his haste, Frank could not help marveling anew at the trees which bordered the road. They lay flat on the ground with their branches pointing like magnets away from the center of the planet. These, he thought, would serve to keep him from losing his way and enable him, if he should rescue Marie in a wild and uninhabited district, to make his way back to the capital without difficulty. He hoped so, anyway.

After another hour's travel, he brought up short at a crossroads. On the damp ground were countless claw marks, made undoubtedly by Puro's revolutionists. Evidently Bert had joined them here. Frank slowed down now, realizing that a direct attack upon such a force would be fatal. He kept on doggedly, however, and soon was rewarded by hearing in the distance the buzzing like that of a thousand hives of bees, which marked the location of the enemy.

He kept at a safe distance until the short day had passed and Puro's men encamped beside a wide and shallow river. As the Sun slid over the edge of the comet, the inevitable clouds rolled down and the rain soon was lashing Frank's back until it ached.

He waited until the camp appeared asleep; then, disregarding his discomfort, crept toward it, hoping

to evade any guards and effect a quick rescue.

Hardly had he approached the first line of shelters—they were nothing more than strips of metal set up on the windward side of each company of soldiers—than a flash from a ray gun seared the vegetation to cinders, despite the rain. The blast missed him only by inches. Instantly other sentries took up the fusillade. Frank was faced with the alternative of being burned to a crisp or developing tactics which would throw his attackers into confusion.

Unhesitatingly he chose the latter course. Reaching down, he grasped one of the metal strips which served as a "tent" for the soldiers. It was about eight feet long, three inches wide, and an inch thick. Using it like a pole vaulter, the youth hurled himself in great leaps straight into the heart of the enemy camp.

The strategy completely baffled the sentries, who, of course, could only see their enemy when he was standing on the ground. They set up a wild buzzing as they scuttled back and forth, which in a few moments threw the whole camp into turmoil. As he progressed in eight-foot bounds, Frank saw the companies scrambling to arms like gigantic ants whose hill has been molested. Speed was his only salvation.

As he neared the center of the encampment, Frank caught sight of Bert, who was crouched in the dim light beside a still figure on the ground. The chemist had seized a ray gun and was firing frantically at the oncomer. But he was trembling with fright and inexperienced with the weapon. To add to his difficulty, his enemy altered his jack-rabbit course repeatedly as he came charging forward.

At last he was upon them. Gathering himself for one supreme effort, he hurled himself feet foremost, striking Bert squarely in the chest and hurling him head over heels into the mud.

But Frank did not escape unscathed. For a fleeting moment the ray had made contact! The effect was as if his body had been seared by a white-hot iron.

Staggering, dazed, he bent down, grasped the girl, who was bound hand and foot, and succeeded in throwing her over his shoulder. Then, snatching up his pole, he started a wild retreat. His arms seemed drained of all strength and felt like blazing torches. He gritted his teeth and lurched on, while ray guns flashed in all directions, the rain poured down in lashing, horizontal torrents, and the wind howled.

How he escaped from that inferno, he never knew. Dimly he recalled reaching the open country. Still more vaguely he remembered that when the pursuit had died away he had allowed Marie to slip from his shoulders and had cut her bonds. After that—nothing.

A long while later Frank came back to consciousness to find himself lying in his old bed in the hut. A dim light shown by the bedside, and the rattle of paper near by convinced him that his adventure had not been a halucination.

His old fear for Marie came back to him with a rush as his mind cleared. He tried to sit up, but felt a detaining hand on his shoulder. Marie was bending over him. For a moment he stared up at her sweet, anxious face.

"'Lo, darling," he said softly as though he had always used that term of endearment. "You're really beautiful, aren't you?"

She blushed.

"Thank God, you have come back to me," she whispered, kneeling beside him. "For a while we thought that——"

Suddenly tears filled her eyes. She bent down and touched her lips to his in their first kiss. Frank did not marvel at this change from their almost casual relationship in the past. It seemed now as if they had always been lovers, but had not known it.

"Tell me about yourself." He captured one of her slim hands in his.

"You know most of it already. Bert sneaked into my room that morning and tied my hands and feet before I awakened. The storm was making so much noise that I couldn't rouse you by my screaming. He jammed a gag into my mouth. Then he dragged me out and carried me for a while. When he wasn't looking, I dropped bits of moss as a guide to you. I knew you would follow.

"Bert wore himself out in the first half mile. When he set me down, I hoped you would catch up with us. But he prodded me along with a ray gun until we caught up with Puro. Then I almost despaired, until you came flying through the air and picked me up."

"Did Bert molest you in any way?"

"No. Puro kept him too busy talking about plans for three-dimensional weapons and explosives. You see, that old flat devil has a little town on the edge of the planet. Ever since he was elevated he has been planning a revolt. Our spies tell us that he is already manufacturing munitions according to Bert's specifications."

"Wait a minute. How long have I been lying here like this?"

"Two weeks, darling. You had a terrible burn. We thought you'd never recover. The best thinsie doctors from all over Umenia came to treat you."

A WEEK LATER, Frank was strong enough to be up and about. Slowly he threaded his way through the Umenian capital, which had become an armed camp during his absence, and marveled at the changes that had come over the thinsies since he last had seen them.

"Oh, you've got a lot to learn about the Umenians," chuckled the doctor. "They aren't really two-dimensional, of course—no living thing could be. They merely thought in two dimensions, just as we think in three, merely because we've had no need of a fourth dimension. This flat world allowed them to fulfill all their desires without rising above it. In fact, they prefer to live in two dimensions. It was an awful struggle to elevate them."

Since Frank had left the city, however, the inhabitants seemed to have grasped many ideas of the third dimension. The walls were surrounded by shallow defense trenches; many of the soldiers were moving about dragging supply wagons behind them, while a company or so of the thinsies had been provided with little tricycles on which their heads and what might be called their shoulders rested. These vehicles lifted their occupants two feet above the ground and enabled them to become conscious of height for the time time in their history. Frank was amazed to see the ease with which they scooted about.

"I had intended to equip the whole army with those 'elevators,'" explained the doctor, "but the king wants to attack with very little delay, so we could get few of them

completed in time for the advance. Don't you think they'll give us a great advantage over the rebels?"

He wilted visibly when Frank explained that Bert probably would hit on the same idea.

"Don't think he has it in him," grunted the little man. "Well, we must lick him, anyway. Our lives won't be safe until we do."

Even Toko had succumbed to the three-dimensional urge. He greeted the convalescent from a raised metal throne when the trio of Earthlings went into the royal tent. He still used his antennæ to communicate with them telepathetically, since even the doctor had never been able to learn the buzzing audible language of the Umenians.

"Your illustrious father has in-indeed opened my eyes to a new world," he said courteously. "He is now my secretary of state and is going to lead the attack upon the rebels."

"But I don't know the first thing about military tactics," the doctor groaned after they had finished paying their respects to the monarch and were alone once more. "What shall I do?"

"I don't know a thing about fighting, either," said Frank. "Now, if it were football——"

"Fine," cried Marie. "Let's make a football game out of it. How would you proceed?"

"Well, the flatheads who aren't provided with kiddie cars could be the linesmen. We'll divide the Umenians who have been elevated into two divisions of one hundred each to represent the right and left half backs. The three of us will receive the ball at full back."

"What ball?" asked the girl.

"Let's not worry about that just yet. The capital will be the goal post for old Umenia. If Puro is defeated, he'll fall back on his city. We'll let the enemy kick off in midfield and try to run the ball clear back over the edge of the planet."

"How about the strategy of the home team?" queried his father.

"That's right. Wheeler's knowledge of chemistry is the ball you were asking for. Puro hasn't had time to construct guns, but he could have made bombs and grenades. We'll have to use open formation, then."

As the Sun slanted toward the zenith in closer and closer spirals, King Toko's army marched, as queer a sight as a vision in a nightmare. In the van wriggled eight companies of one hundred flatlanders each. Behind them scooted two hundred others, mounted on their platforms and able to wreak destruction above the bodies of the "linesmen." In the rear of the thinsies marched Frank, the doctor, and Marie. The girl had refused to be left behind, declaring that she was as good a soldier as any man there.

Ten days of travel brought them to Puro's camp. But the alarm had gone before, and the rebel army was drawn up to receive them.

"Thought so," said Frank. "Notice the artillery."

In the rear of the camp could be seen a line of earthworks, over which peeped the muzzles of what looked like a battery of cannon. Behind these, Bert could be seen crouching low to the ground.

"I thought you said there would be no cannon!" Marie began.

"Just sheet-metal mortars," explained the doctor. "Range probably only a few hundred yards."

"Why not try a flank movement and force them to remount those guns?" asked Frank.

"You forget that we're on the 'up' side of the planet," returned his fa-

ther. "If we flank them, our positions will be reversed, and we'll find it hard to charge them against the centrifugal pull. No, we'd better advance in close formation until they open fire, then spread out and continue by rushes. Their first shots will go wild and do little or no damage."

Striving to conquer a shaky feeling in his legs, the doctor then gave the necessary commands to the captains of the Umenian companies, and the advance began. Frank meanwhile renewed his pleas for Marie to stay behind, but she shook her head stubbornly and gripped a ray gun as she plodded along beside him.

"If you are defeated, I can't escape," she said. "If I'm with you, maybe I can help. The battle isn't always to the strong, somebody said."

The little army went forward with a rush; but, strangely enough, found no resistance to their advance. Instead, Puro's forces, at the head of which could be discerned Bert's spare figure, turned and scuttled pell-mell from the trenches.

Buzzing like maddened bees, Toko's forces poured over the deserted breastworks. Frank, Marie, the doctor, and a few of their thinsie aids were quickly outdistanced by the victory-seeking soldiery.

Too late Frank scented an ambush. They had reached the center of the enemy camp when he shouted wildly: "The cannon! Mind the cannon!"

Looking behind them, the Earth people gasped in dismay. Pale, greenish gas was belching from the muzzles of the flimsy "guns," and, carried by the planet's unvarying wind, was drifting silently down upon them.

"Chlorine gas," cried the doctor, cold fear gripping his heart. "Get above it, Frank, or we're done for! I'll run ahead and warn the king. You two and what thinsies have stayed with us try to capture the battery and turn off the gas."

Frank and Marie went into hurried contact with their aids, who numbered scarcely more than a dozen, then swung to the right to dodge the deadly, spreading fog, and began a hampered run "uphill" to the guns. Hardly had they started, however, when the sand seemed to boil to right and left of the emplacement and a score of Puro's men, who had lain hidden beneath the smoothed-over surface during the advance, crawled into view. Ray guns were grasped in their claws, gas masks were strapped over their ugly flat muzzles, and their foreparts were elevated by tricycles similar to those used by the royal forces.

Then began a strange duel. The red heat rays of the loyal Umenians spurted forth on their errands of destruction, but were met in midair by the flashes from the guns of the rebels. The result was a series of loud explosions which canceled the effects of both weapons. Back and forth wove the beams, dimly visible in the Sunlight, always keeping in crackling contact except when one of the opponents would slip his beam around that of his enemy, exactly as a fencer uses his rapier. Then would come a short, agonized buzz, a ray gun would tumble into the sand, and a flatlander would stiffen in smoking death.

Frank and Marie soon found themselves engaged with two of Puro's soldiers. Her face white and terror in her eyes, the girl yet handled her unfamiliar weapon like a veteran, dodging out of harm's way as a red beam flashed close, swaying, side-stepping like a swordsman.

Whenever Frank could find time to steal a glance in her direction, he was amazed to note the grace and agility with which she fought.

It was one of those side glances which almost signed his death warrant. At the instant when his eyes were refocusing on his own enemy, he stepped into one of the holes wherein the rebels had been in ambush, stumbled, and went to his knees, his gun flying into the air.

The creature with which he had been engaged hesitated a moment as its untrained eyes tried to follow this quick maneuver. Then it located its enemy again, and the ray swung steadily down to burn the enemy to a cinder.

Out of the corner of his eye Frank saw Marie swing her weapon to focus on his foe. This left her unprotected from her own adversary. He tried to shout a warning —to tell her not to mind him but to save herself—but at that instant heard a reassuring hiss from behind him as one of his flat aids, recognizing the danger, scrambled into the battle, caught Marie's adversary off guard, and reduced it to smoking ruin.

"Keep your mind on your work after this, Frank," gasped the girl. "I can take care of myself. Anyway, we've got them on the run."

Surely enough, the growing casualties in the ranks of the opposing company had broken its morale. Abandoning the unwieldy tricycles, the defenders of the battery were scuttling madly to safety, leaving the gas guns unprotected.

It took Frank but a moment to shut off the chlorine valves, but he could do nothing to stop the cloud of gas already emitted, which was rolling down the plain in a thick blanket toward friend and foe alike. From the other side of this curtain loud explosions and excited buzzings told that Puro's men had stopped their feigned retreat and turned upon the king's forces, who thus were to be held in a trap until the gas swept down to strangle them.

Panting with exhaustion, Frank and Marie watched the tumbling green waves sweep slowly over the sand. They were silent in dazed horror. Frank tried to speak, but his dry throat would not emit a sound. He pictured his father strangling, falling, dying behind that curtain, and a wild impulse to scream, to fling himself into it, almost overpowered him.

"I don't feel so badly for the thinsies," he heard Marie confessing softly as she clung to his arm. "They never seem quite real to me. But your father is caught in there. We'll have to save him, somehow."

"If we could only let them know that the gas blanket is only a hundred yards thick, I believe they could charge back through it without much damage," replied the other. "But if they let it drift down on them while the enemy stops their advance, all will be dead before it drifts on. It's moving very slowly and won't pass over for minutes. I'm sure of that."

"A hundred yards thick, you say?" Marie gasped.

"Well, maybe two hundred. Not more than that. Wait. I'll chance it."

Suiting the action to the word, Frank ripped off what remained of his shirt and wrapped it around his nose and mouth. "Good-by, Marie," he cried thickly through the improvised mask, and was gone before she could protest, running straight toward the gas screen.

"He'll never make it!" the girl moaned in terror. "He has to come

back through it, too, and he's still weak."

She wrung her hands as she watched him disappear into the mist.

Frank ran as he had never done on the gridiron. The devilish green poison burned his eyes and blinded him; his lungs soon began quaking for air, but he kept on doggedly, holding his breath as his thoughts raced ahead. Treated the old man bad enough. Couldn't let him be trapped like this. Must get through!

His knees grew weak as though they were turning to water. His head throbbed like a drum. Still there was no end to the gas, but the sounds of fighting grew stronger, telling him that he was traveling in the right direction.

Like a spring mechanism which has run down, his legs sprawled from under him. He plunged forward a few more steps, took a long, tearing, involuntary breath, and fell. All over, he mused vaguely.

But the air did not claw at his lungs as he had expected. Then he realized that he had broken through the screen somewhere before he collapsed. This thought and the fresh air revived him. He scrambled to his feet and, reeling and groggy, stumbled toward where Toko's men were engaged by their gas-masked enemy.

"Dad, dad," he panted as the doctor came running to meet him. "Turn them back! The gas is only a hundred yards thick. We've shut it off. If Toko's men retreat through it, they can escape. If they stay here, they'll be suffocated."

Doctor Strauss shouted with delight at this chance for life and ran to communicate with the king. Toko communicated with his captains. And within a few minutes after Frank had burst through the screen, the royal army was in orderly, though precipitate, retreat, leaving their enemies nonplused at what they must have considered a suicidal flight.

Back through the green hell Frank plunged, one arm around the shoulders of his father, pushing the old man ahead as both were shaken by fits of coughing. No use trying not to breathe at the slow pace he now was obliged to take. Must use only the tops of his lungs. Easy there, don't cough!

He dragged the doctor forward as the latter's steps began to falter. At last he was forced to pick the older man up and carry him. If only one of the hundreds of Umenians whom he heard coughing and rustling over the ground at his feet could rise up and help him carry his burden!

Marie was lifting his father from his back! Frank slipped into pleasant oblivion.

HE REVIVED to feel a cooling sensation in his raw throat. He felt the clawlike hands of a thinsie doctor manipulating his chest. Through red-rimmed eyes he made out Marie's face bending over him.

"I'm all right, darling," he managed to gasp.

"Most certainly you are out of danger, honorable, sir," he felt the thoughts of his physician humming through his brain. "Your courage has saved Umenia. Your noble parent is doing nicely, also. Do not exert yourself, however."

"How is the battle going?" the patient gasped, his blurred mind filled with visions of the masked enemy pouring down upon them.

"We've got them licked," Marie answered. "We followed up the gas curtain and struck them while they were still demoralized at Toko's retreat. Our men ran so fast that they were practically unharmed by the

chlorine gas. The field is a shambles."

And, in fact, when Frank insisted on sitting up, it was to witness a debacle. Not far off was a little group of perhaps a hundred survivors from the rebel army. These were surrounded by buzzing hordes of royalists.

Puro's men presented a sorry spectacle. Their flimsy "elevators" were almost all lost or broken, and they were reduced to their former two-dimensional state.

As his vision cleared, Frank drew in his breath sharply. In the center of that circle Bert Wheeler was crouched, shouting unheeded orders, imploring, yammering in a mad frenzy of fear.

"Can't we save Bert?" croaked Frank. "After all, he isn't bad enough to deserve a fate like that."

"I'm afraid not," Marie sighed. "The king and his men blame Bert for this whole affair."

The group of survivors was dwindling rapidly as they spoke. Time after time little puffs of smoke would arise and leave a rebel shriveled into a pile of brownish ashes. Yet the doomed creatures kept up a steady return fire and held off the royalist hordes.

A few minutes more, however, and they must have realized that it was all over. Suddenly Puro's men ceased firing. Then, with one accord, their ray guns swung inward and flashed together.

Even at that distance, the other Earthlings could see Bert's agonized expression as he leaped to his feet screaming when the rays focused their combined strength upon him. For a moment he stood with his feet enveloped in a sea of red flame. Then he began to grow shorter! Screaming still, he seemed to melt a foot into the ground before he flung out both arms and crashed forward on his face.

The shafts of light did not falter. Bert's writhing body continued to melt into the sand. His screaming became a moan and died away. Puro's false leader had paid the price of failure.

Frank could not tear his eyes away as the royalists, infuriated by this thwarting of their efforts to capture the unfortunate youth, went into action. Their rays swept the nearly defenseless rebels like a scourge. There was a spurt or two of red flame in reply. Then the last of Puro's following was gone.

"Oh, how awful!" whimpered Marie, shuddering convulsively as she clung to her lover. "Poor old Bert didn't deserve that."

And that was all the epitaph he received.

Darkness was falling by the time King Toko had rallied his forces and paid his respects to his secretary of state, who now was able to sit up and talk a bit, although his lungs had been badly scorched by the gas.

"Will you deign to return to my capital city, most illustrious sir, and receive all the honors which Umenia can confer upon you?" his majesty demanded as he and the Earthlings sat in contact on the blood-stained field.

"You honor us," sighed the little doctor a trifle bitterly as he glanced up into the evening sky where the Earth hung, green and fair, like a giant scythe blade. "We will try to repay you for your hospitality by teaching your people all that we know."

Hours later, as the two disabled men and the girl were being dragged homeward over the sand on a makeshift litter made of discarded elevators and drawn by a score of the

thinsie soldiers, the doctor began muttering almost deliriously.

"There are these rocket ships," he murmured while Frank and Marie clasped each other's hands and smiled tenderly down at him. "Maybe we can build one and get back to Earth. Never can tell. What a write-up I'd get in the papers if we did!"

Energy of the Universe

REPORTS recently by Professor Robert A. Millikan, Doctor I. S. Bowen and Doctor H. V. Neher in *The Physical Review,* indicate that cosmic rays form half of all the radiant that strikes the Earth. In the universe as a whole, the amount of cosmic radiation is from thirty to three hundred times greater than all other forms of energy combined.

It is now commonly known that the universe consists of tremendous depths of empty space dotted by tiny specks, called galaxies; and that these galactic specks have scattered over them, just as sparsely, still smaller things called suns. The suns in turn have parasitic bodies near them called planets. Man lives on one of these.

On this microscopic scale the common concept that energy is what one uses in performing some physical task shrinks into complete insignificance. What makes up ninety-nine per cent of all the energy in the universe is radiant energy flying with the speed of light through space.

A small amount of this energy apparently comes from our Sun and its millions of fellows as they radiate light by the familiar process of losing part of their mass. In this way the Sun turns two hundred and fifty million tons of mass into light every minute. The theory that the process will eventually result in the "heat death" of the Sun is not as firmly held as it was formerly.

But there is still the greater part of the energy in the universe to explain. The report of Professor Millikan is only one of several that maintains cosmic rays form this part.

The explanation of the difficulty is that no such ready mechanism, like the burning up of the Sun, is at hand to be seized by scientists. However, three theories do exist as possible paths of approach. One is that the distant suns and stars may emit cosmic rays by a burning-up process exactly as our Sun emits light. Experience says no, but the conditions on these stars are practically unknown.

A second theory would have it that some of these distant bodies may contain elements of an unstable nature, like uranium, which breaks up of its own accord and emits the cosmic rays just as uranium and radium emit gamma rays.

A third theory maintains that there is a building-up process going on out in space whereby heavier elements are formed by the union of lighter ones. Such a linkage has been effected in isolated cases in laboratories, and when it does occur penetrating radiation is emitted. It may occur in space, also.

Always the same, that dream—with the mad woman's dagger nearing my throat. Yet I loved her!

My Lady of the Tunnel

by Arthur J. Burks

THERE IS NOTHING obscure or even particularly strange about it. I know exactly at what period of my life the grim dream started. As for its aftermath, the end of it, I am convinced that another hand will set it down, for I shall not be alive to do so. And I feel that the end will come here in this house under the elms, gloomy and forbidding, on Long Island.

It is a far cry from Long Island to the Western homestead where the dream began, and necessitates a sort of recapitulation. But for me that is easy, because every phase of it is written on the retina of my memory as though in letters of fire. Listen, then.

It began with a story. I was, I should say, about thirteen years of age. I was studious. I read everything I could find that was readable.

However, in a Western homestead, operated by my mother, who labored like a strong man from dawn to dusk and never had any money for purchase of anything save the barest necessities, reading matter was limited.

We had subscribed to one metropolitan newspaper—on which our subscription was always very much in arrears—and it was in this paper that I found the serial called "My Lady of the Tunnel." To-day that story perhaps would not be run in any magazine or newspaper in the land, but I'm referring now to a serial which ran twenty years ago. Those twenty years, during which I have lived more than the average man does in two lifetimes, seem to have passed in a flash. But when I sit down and review them, which I can't help doing at intervals—for I *must* to keep from going insane—the time seems to have been ages ago.

Perhaps you read that story? It was written by a man called Herman Panzer. I recall very little of the actual story, save that it had something to do with the Civil War, of spies and counterspies—all the unholy stuff of death and destruction, of heartache and heartbreak—and of horror.

It seems there was an aged house —I'm referring to that story now— which was connected with another house almost a mile away by a tunnel. There came a time in the shifting fortunes of war when the rebels held one of the houses, the Federals the other—and often the enemies tried to trick each other by way of the tunnel. Whether they ever succeeded or not is immaterial. What *is* material is that many lives were lost in these attempts, and not one of them in either cause.

Those who died were murdered, struck down in the dark, and when found, each one had a knife thrust to the hilt in his throat.

According to the story, the tunnel was inhabited by a mad woman dressed in white. Perhaps she could see in the dark. I don't know. It was quite safe for any one to traverse the tunnel if that one carried a lantern. But if one stepped into the darkness, there always followed a shriek, a moan, and the careless one was found supine on the tunnel floor, a dagger driven to the hilt in his throat, and on his face a look of abysmal horror.

Nobody was ever stabbed with anything but a dagger. Not a poniard, a stiletto, or anything except a dagger. The mere word has, ever since, been good for a shudder when I see it in print or hear it spoken.

That story, because I was an imaginative boy, frightened me half to death, and to-day thought of it still does.

Our shack on the homestead had one huge room. It had two beds, one of which folded up against the wall. My mother slept in the big bed, my brother and I in the folding bed—and I was always forgetting things. You see, I was now old enough to do a few things around the homestead, but I was scatterbrained, and in the end my imagination and my scatter-brainedness will be my undoing.

We would be in bed, perhaps my brother and I asleep. The light would be out, and the room filled with darkness. Our shack was lonely, our nearest neighbor being several miles away. We had a barn at some little distance, say seventy-five yards, from the house. We had two horses and a milk cow, a turkey gobbler and a couple of turkey hens, and a small flock of chickens.

"George," my mother would say suddenly out of the darkness, "I'll

bet you forgot to separate the cow and calf before you went to bed! If you leave them together, there won't be any milk in the morning. Go and see, now!"

"Aw, mother," I would say, "I didn't forget!"

"You've got the quilts over your head again," my mother would reply sharply. "Some of these days you'll smother. What makes you cover up like that? Your brother Charlie doesn't."

How could I tell her that my brother Charlie, who had no imagination, was not interested in reading, and wouldn't even listen to me when I tried to tell him the story of "My Lady of the Tunnel"? How could mother understand that I kept the quilts up around my throat to keep the lady of the tunnel from stabbing me in the throat with a dagger? One couldn't say such things to my mother. One would have been spanked, big as one was. Mother was a hard-headed, practical person.

And there was a phrase in the story which always gave me the shivers. It seemed that on occasion the tunnel woman appeared to prospective victims. A man would be shaving, for example. A door behind him would open slowly. In his mirror he would watch it, and shiver a little, perhaps, but hold quite still, razor poised. Then, a bit at a time, "the haggard, ghostly lineaments of the mad woman" would appear through the door. Always she would be crawling on her hands and knees, would be dressed in immaculate white, and her fair hand would grip the handle of a dagger—always a dagger. Later I wondered where she got all her daggers, as she invariably left the weapon in the wound in the throat of her victim. But I couldn't argue myself out of my fears by ridiculing such obvious details.

"I'm sure I separated the cow and calf," I insisted to mother.

"Get up and go see if you did!"

What a horror that was! I would rise, and quickly, too, since mother meant it when she gave orders, to slip into my overalls and go out to the dark barn. I would try to slip on my overalls with one hand, while with the other I would hold my pillow over my throat to keep back the dagger of the woman of the tunnel! Then, when I had dressed, and reached the door, and flung it open to let the moonlight in, I would find myself bathed in cold sweat. And I took the pillow to the barn with me!

Once out in the open, I would run. I would try to keep my eyes from wandering across the moonlit homestead, which was not all cultivated, and was heavily wooded with sagebrush and greasewood, because I knew from past experience what I would see among the shadows: a wraithlike figure, a slender woman, dressed all in white, moving like a cloud of smoke or fog among the brushwood! I knew she wasn't there, yet always I saw her.

At the barn, invariably I would find that I *had* failed to separate the cow and calf. And while I did it, moving fearfully in the darkness of the barn, I held my pillow over my throat with one hand.

Then I would run back to the house as fast as I could, afraid to look back for fear of seeing "the haggard, ghostly lineaments of the mad woman," in full pursuit, dagger grasped in uplifted hand.

I would slam the door and literally hurl myself into bed, covering my head immediately with the quilts.

But I read "My Lady of the Tun-

nel" through to the bitter end. Now I know that the story really had no end, because I was a part of it, and it can end only when I am dead.

That horror of getting up in the dark has stayed with me almost to this day, though of course I no longer guard my throat with a pillow; but I do get cold sweats when I move in the dark and strain my eyes for a sight of the "haggard, ghostly lineaments of the mad woman."

I DON'T KNOW where the dream began. That part is hazy, and is made more so because I was never exactly able to tell where reality ended and the dream began. At first, after finishing "My Lady," I was only afraid of the dark, so analogous, I fancied, with the tunnel in the story. And the older I became, the worse became my obsession. Reason told me that it was all just a story, and that nothing would ever happen to me. I'd probably die of something else, though my mother often told me that I was born to be hanged.

The cold sweats, the stark, almost gibbering fear of the dark, finally brought on the inevitable. I would go to sleep with the covers over my throat. I always did that, and inevitably the tunnel woman followed me into my dreams. Out of it all I've come to this conclusion: that we have nothing to say about our own destiny. I am just as sure that my whole life was laid out for me at birth, and that I can change not one iota of it, as I am that my mother was the greatest woman on the face of the earth, or above, or under it. And may she outlive me!

So I started dreaming, and my dream was invariably the same:

I would "waken," in the dream, in the tunnel of the story. I never knew quite where it was, and it didn't matter. I would waken in the midst of Panzer's story. I would be just starting through the tunnel, holding the lantern high before me with one hand, while with the other I would hold a thick pillow against my throat. I knew that the mad woman wouldn't attack so long as I held the lighted lantern. But no matter how carefully my lantern was lighted, or how well the wick was trimmed, or how filled the lantern was with oil, there was always the chance that a cold breeze in the tunnel would extinguish the light—and then the mad woman would strike.

In my dream I would always encounter the mad woman in the tunnel. She would always have the dagger in her hand. But to me her face was neither haggard nor ghostly. You see, the horror of my dream was this: even as a child, when the dreams first began, I loved the mad woman!

As a child, I loved her as I loved my first school-teacher, with a child's adoration. But I loved life, too. The mad woman, whom I called "Sybil," because she was called that in "My Lady of the Tunnel," had a beautiful smile, and her eyes told me that she loved me, too. But I couldn't escape the fact that she was mad, and that she killed people.

So, though I loved her as a child loves a grown woman, and she loved me as a grown woman loves all children, she always attacked me with the dagger just as my light went out. And my lantern always went out at exactly the same place in the dream—and always I would be fighting with all my childish strength against the mad woman. Now that I could no longer see her beautiful face, because of darkness,

I thought of it as "haggard and ghostly." I would protect my throat with the pillow, while with my free hand I would seek to keep Sybil from slaying me. I loved her, so I refused to hurt her. I merely tried to disarm her. I spoke to her of my love, even as I fought for my life; but never, at any time, then or in later years, did she answer me.

As we fought, I would smell a heady perfume in my nostrils, sweet, overpowering. My hand would touch her skin, soft and delightful to the touch as the down on young peaches. Her breath would fan my cheeks. Her body would press against me. I would try to locate the knife in the dark. I would sense it darting to my throat. I would grasp the wrist of the knife hand; but always she would be stronger than I, strong with the strength of madness—and she would force my hand down as the knife moved inexorably to my throat.

It would touch the pillow I held, and continue on into the feathers with which the pillow was stuffed. Closer and closer it would come to my throat. And then, when the point touched my throat, I would waken in reality to find my pillow against my throat, my body bathed in sweat, and tired as though I had fought a real fight—and often as not my mother would be standing at the bedside in her white nightgown, shaking me.

"Wake up! Wake up!" she would be saying in exasperation. "You're having such a loud nightmare nobody can sleep!"

It would take me a minute to discover that mother wasn't Sybil, for the resemblance, especially to eyes just opened from sleep, was terrifying.

I knew I would never marry, never love, any one but Sybil. And since I knew that there was no Sybil really, I knew I would never marry or love any woman. Of course, I was a child who couldn't see into the future—fortunately. If people could see into the future, the world would go mad.

I guess I was a strange lad. I know I read everything, and my selections always aroused the ire of my elders. I read everything weird, occult, and strange that I could find. I read history, poetry, the world's finest prose. I read Horatio Alger and Oliver Optic. Yes, I read. I couldn't master the multiplication table, but knew whole chapters of the Bible by heart. I could quote verses, many verses, from "Paradise Lost," from "Il Penseroso," "The Ancient Mariner"—any verse I read and liked, and I read all and liked all.

But the Alger books dealt with New York.

One day I told my mother:

"Some day I'm going to New York."

"You'll be a farmer," my mother said. "You'll never see New York."

Later I read something about Long Island, and became more specific.

"I shall live in an old sedate house on Long Island," I told my mother.

"I don't know where Long Island is," replied mother, "but if it's more than ten miles from this homestead you'll never even see it."

I put this in here to show that even then destiny was shaping itself in me. I *knew* I was going to Long Island, New York, some day. There was no hurry about it, but I knew I could not escape it any more than I could escape death—or loving Sybil.

And I knew, even then, that I didn't really wish to go to Long

Island. Deep down inside me, as a matter of fact, something warned me that I must *never* live in "an old sedate" house on Long Island; at the same time I knew in my very soul that I could not escape going and living in the nebulous house of my fancy. Then it was all very hazy. Now I know that it was all worked out beforehand, and that I couldn't have escaped.

I imagine my wanderings, before I finally came to live in this house where this is being written, were in the nature of attempts to escape my destiny, whatever it may prove to be. Concerning that I know nothing, save that the end of this story must *inevitably* be written by another hand than mine.

I feel that, believe it, but cannot tell you why.

The dream of Sybil came to me during all my childhood and youth. When I joined the Marine Corps during the War, I often felt much ashamed of myself because, when I had to crawl out of my bunk to take over my tour of sentry duty, I always either covered my throat with my upflung arm or with a pillow. I was caught at it innumerable times. But I didn't tell my buddies of my nightmares, and their constant gibing, instead of breaking me of my fears, made them worse. The dream came almost every night. And there were times when I had a particularly gloomy post to walk, when I could see Sybil, ethereal as creeping mist, among the shadows, especially on what my buddies called the "graveyard watch." I imagine the very words brought forth the fancy, for my imagination had certainly become no less.

The War meant little to me, so I pass it over. Too much has already been written about it. But Sybil was my ever constant companion throughout all that time. I fought with her at night, when I dreamed, and my buddies laughed at me because I cried out the name of "Sybil" in my sleep. They wouldn't have understood if I had told them, or perhaps they would have. I often saw Sybil in the smoke of battle, and she was part of the smoke, so that none but I might see her. I guess I was a fair sort of soldier—and I wasn't especially unusual, for my buddies liked me in spite of constant chaffing about Sybil and my nightmares, which sometimes wakened the whole barracks because I shouted.

I was commissioned. I rose from the ranks. I say this not to boast, but to show that I must have been a normal man, and certainly a bit beyond the average in mentality.

I was ordered to the West Indies —and I lost Sybil! My dreams ended abruptly, and I had peace. That lasted for a year or so. I forgot to cover my throat when I walked in the dark. I still loved Sybil, but I was becoming more normal in my own eyes. I was growing up. I might even marry, though, of course, my wife must resemble the Sybil of my dreams. That was important. You see, the reason why I fought so carefully with Sybil in my dreams was that I was fighting not against her, but for her. I wanted to save her from madness, for myself. In my dream I knew I dreamed; but I also knew that my dreams were as real as reality. I can't explain that. You'll have to accept it, at least, until you've listened to the rest which follows.

Then Sybil came back to me in a strange way.

I WAS SERVING in the intelligence department, and my reports

went directly to the State department in Washington. The place: Santo Domingo City. A multiple murderer had escaped from Nigua Prison. One of my men tried to capture him and was badly wounded by a machete. The commanding general, when I reported the facts to him, said tersely, in a way that commanding generals have:

"Get him!"

The murderer's name was an odd one: "John of the Rose." He was a giant Negro. He had a sense of humor, and his spy system was the greatest I have ever encountered. Within half an hour after I had been ordered to bring him in, I found a note in the pocket of my khaki blouse. How it arrived there I never knew, but it was from John of the Rose, and it was a jeering challenge. He knew I'd been ordered to get him, and told me I would never succeed. He would, he said, play with me, cat-and-mouse fashion, for a couple of months, before he sent me, with a dagger in my throat, to join the others he had murdered.

A dagger in my throat.

As usual, the word "dagger" made me shiver; but any thought of Sybil and John of the Rose at the same time never occurred to me. One was black, one white. One was very real, the other a figment of Herman Panzer's imagination.

John of the Rose made a fool of me for over a month. He sent me a note every day, and I never learned how he did it. Then came the note which brought Sybil back to me. It ran like this:

"I'm tired of being a fugitive. I'll be at the house of the leper in Agua Dulce at midnight to-night. Come for me alone and I'll be there, waiting. Bring any one else and you accomplish nothing. You can arrest me, provided you are physically able. Come armed as you like, as I shall be. The winner either takes John of the Rose to prison—or he commits another murder. John of the Rose."

This has nothing to do with the chronicle, save as it had to do with the return of Sybil. I decided to accept the challenge of John of the Rose. I thrust a couple of automatics into my belt and went out to get the murderer, leaving Santo Domingo City about eleven o'clock at night. Agua Dulce is north of Santo Domingo City, roughly in the area lying between the city and the junction of a smaller river with the Ozama River. This section is almost impenetrable jungle. But I knew every foot of it, because I had made a military map of it.

I started off.

The obvious way to go to the leper's house, which was almost in the center of the area, was to pass through Villa Francesca and take the regular trail that crossed Agua Dulce. But John would expect me by that way. So I went instead through the Gate of San Diego—named to honor the son of Christopher Columbus, whose ruined palaces remain to the left of the gate as you exit—to the Ozama River. There I purloined a *yola*, a small skiff, belonging to some unknown native fisherman. With this I rowed upriver almost to the spot where the smaller river flows into the Ozama.

There I went ashore, set the boat adrift, knowing it would be picked up where the outgoing waters of the Ozama and the incoming waters of the Caribbean meet, next morning, and restored to its owner. Then I felt about until I found a trail leading into the jungle toward the leper's house—so called because a

man had died in it of that disease. I went boldly into the trail. It was midnight. The trees met above the trail, absolutely shutting out the moonlight. It was so dark that I could see nothing, and I followed the aged trail by feeling for it with my feet. I couldn't see my hand against my eyes. Once in a while a firefly sped through the jungle, his light so large, seemingly, that I stopped and listened for the motor, imagining a charging automobile. But I couldn't even hear the honking motor horns in Santo Domingo City, only two miles away, but apparently two hundred. This was as much jungle, and as many things could happen here, as in the heart of the Cordillera Centrales. It was the forest primeval.

I got well into the trail before I remembered something. Two years before, an intelligence officer had accepted a challenge such as John of the Rose had sent me. They found his headless body beside a tree several days later. He had been decapitated by a machete. His head was never found.

I went cold. John of the Rose was already a multiple murderer. He wouldn't hesitate to kill me. Already he might be close enough to touch me. He was a native—and once a native had followed me for an hour through the jungle, and I'd never have known he was there if I hadn't stopped so suddenly he bumped into me with startled apologies—almost, incidentally, making me swallow my tongue with fear.

However, I had to go through. But now and again I could see the white trunks of ceiba trees. I knew them, but they looked like human figures dressed in white. They were big enough for any one even so huge as John to hide behind. I might pass one. A man, John, might step out and decapitate me with a single slash of his machete.

So, without realizing what I did, I lifted my forearm to cover my throat. At first I didn't get the significance of this. I was almost to the clearing before I recalled that I had done this many nights in my life. And instead of fearing John of the Rose when realization came, I feared Sybil.

For here was no dream tunnel, but a real one—and death stalked through it for some one. I felt the hair at the back of my neck stir with my gruesome thoughts. I felt cold finger tips along my spine. Whichever way I turned, I sensed some one behind me to take my life. The woods, reason told me, were deserted, and John of the Rose was probably many miles distant—but something inside me made a fool of reason.

Ever and anon I stopped to listen, and always I stood well away from trees, with my forearm across throat. But already I confused John of the Rose with Sybil, and it was Sybil whom I feared. I heard no sounds at all. John of the Rose, if he was close, would make none, naturally. And Sybil could not. And both were here, at least in my imagination.

I plodded on.

I came to the clearing in which the house of the leper was situated. The woods were behind me, and in my fancy scores of hands reached for me. I was in a cold sweat, as badly frightened as I had been after reading the most lurid installment of "My Lady of the Tunnel."

I—well, it scarcely matters that I caught my automatics in my hands and hurled myself across the clearing at the door of that hut. I smashed through, to find the hut empty. I circled the shack, to find

not a living soul, nothing that lived save the darting fireflies and the mosquitoes which made merry on my skin.

I returned to Santo Domingo City by the regular trail. That's not important, either.

Nor is it important that next morning I had a jeering note from John of the Rose. He told me correctly every step that I had taken the night before, who owned the *yola* I had taken, where I had set it adrift—everything. He told me how many times and where I had stopped along that trail—and he laughed at me for covering my throat with my forearm!

I was sure, that night, that I was alone in the jungle, yet how did John of the Rose know all these things?

But that isn't important, either. For that same night, after I fell asleep in my own cot, Sybil came back to me. Again we fought in the tunnel—the same dream in all its details. Yet, crazy as it may sound, it was like a reunion of lovers. Her face mirrored happiness that we were together again even in the nightmare. It was ghastly—and when I finally wakened, I knew I would never in life be free of Sybil.

Things were being said about me in service circles within a few days. I yelled in my sleep, brother officers said. My superiors decided that the tropics were getting my nerves. I couldn't tell them the truth, or they'd have thought me stranger still. I was worried myself, for not a night passed now that I didn't dream of Sybil.

But there was now one change in the dream. Sybil kissed me—a kiss of ineffable sweetness—before she pressed the point of the dagger against my throat!

WELL, I WAS ordered home, in spite of the fact that I wanted to stay in Santo Domingo. I wanted all the knowledge of the island I could gather, for I had begun writing, and wished to write, of the land I had learned, in spite of John of the Rose and his ilk, to love. Angered at the obstinacy of my superiors, I resigned from the service, sure that I could earn my living with my pen, and sailed for the States.

I was assigned to Brooklyn Navy Yard pending acceptance of my resignation.

It came through in due course. It was not until I was installed in quarters in New York, a civilian, that I recalled my boyhood ambition to live in the great metropolis. This made me recall my youthful fancies about an old house on Long Island. Inside me sounded the old voice of warning.

"You are in New York," it said. "Be satisfied with that. Don't putter around Long Island."

It was nothing you could put your finger on, understand. Just an inner warning. In the past, when I had had inner warnings, I had got into trouble for not heeding them. But that I did never kept me from going against fate when the inner warnings came again. It didn't this time.

I would visit Long Island. I could not resist the urge.

But to what part should I go? I hadn't the slightest idea.

I decided, after finishing a couple of short stories and waiting for editors to report on them, to visit Long Island. Long Island is large. There were countless places I could go. How should I decide?

"I'll go to Pennsylvania Station," I decided after a while, "and go to the first place whose name I see on

a ticket as I peer through the window of the ticket office."

I had no sooner come to this decision than that inner voice came even stronger than before.

"Don't go! Don't go!" it said, almost aloud.

But I was stubborn.

I went to the station, and ended by buying a ticket for East Northport. I had no sooner done so than I had the queerest fancy, which only went to prove what I had always, at least subconsciously, believed: that nothing we do is of our own free will, that we go entirely through life, guided! By whom or by what, I don't know. Neither does any one else.

But I couldn't have turned back, after buying that ticket, and exchanged it for another one had my life depended upon it. And my life *did* depend upon it. I was like a man following out a post-hypnotic suggestion. I had no will of my own. I merely bought the ticket and allowed myself to drift. That is all there was to it..

I caught my train, a little surprised to find myself on the right one. I changed at Jamaica without being told. I landed in East Northport. I hadn't the least hesitation. I even hurried a little, as though to get it over with.

Get *what* over with? The inevitable!

I caught a suburban taxi.

"Drive me to Northport," I said.

The driver didn't ask questions. He merely slammed the door and started off. We entered Northport.

"Turn to the right there," I next commanded him.

"If you'll tell me who you wanta visit," he said, "I can take you there by the shortest route."

"I don't know," I said. "Just drive."

He made the turn.

Far down the street, high on the side of the hill, I saw the house. It was just as I had imagined it. It was old and sedate. The blinds looked like sightless eyes. Yes, I knew it well.

"I'll get out here, at this house," I told the driver.

He jerked his head back, startled, to stare at me.

"You don't really mean *here?*" he said.

"But I do. Why shouldn't I?"

"Well, I guess it ain't none of my business, but—well, folks don't ever stop here. You see, the house is——"

"What's wrong with it?"

"Nothin'. It's the old man that lives in it. His name's Caleb Farhm, an' he's——"

The driver touched his forehead. I shivered a little, but I knew how small-town people often regarded perfectly brilliant men as being "a little off." I'd see for myself. Farhm was a bachelor. I wanted to stay in his house, if only for one night. It became an obsession with me, even as I talked with the driver. Maybe Farhm would take me in.

If only I had listened!

I HAVE NOW been in the house of Caleb Farhm for three weeks. He welcomed me without surprise, and readily arranged for me to stay with him. He must have been past seventy years of age. He had never married. He looked strange when he told me that. In his old age he was sorry he had no children. I rapidly became the "son" he had never had. And when I told him I was seeking a place in which to write, he was pitifully eager to be of every assistance to me. And he was extremely wealthy, though miserly with himself.

I'll never forget that first night in the old house, though each night thereafter was more stirring than the one preceding. For almost as I crossed the threshold of the old house I knew something that sent my heart racing, filled me with strange fear and excitement: Sybil was nearer to me here than anywhere else in any other period of my life.

I didn't tell old Caleb Farhm about Sybil—but ever since that first night I'm convinced that he knows! Maybe he listened outside my door when I screamed Sybil's name in my nightmare. For the dream came to me the very first night, more real than ever before. And for the first time Sybil spoke to me as we fought in the dream tunnel.

"We are closer together than ever before," she said, while her fair lips moved as though she kissed me with the words. "And now, my dear, you shall in very truth release me."

The fight was the same. The dagger was the same. I wakened when it touched my throat. And Sybil said:

"I try to keep from using the dagger, but my madness prevents me. Fight against me, fight hard, even to the point of slaying me—for if my dagger penetrates your throat, you will die!"

I remembered all this when I wakened to hear Caleb Farhm pounding on my door. His quavering voice came through the panels.

"What ails you, son? What ails you?"

I let old Caleb in. He stared at me as though he thought me bereft of all my senses.

"You've something on your mind, your conscience," he said. "Tell me."

So, while I hadn't told him at first, I now did.

Understand that in this writing I am covering several nights. I confessed my obsession to old Caleb. I told him of the story of "My Lady of the Tunnel." He listened. There was a strange light in his eyes which made me recall the gesture of the taxicab driver when he had dropped me at old Caleb's door. But I hadn't found anything about Caleb to fear. He was eccentric, perhaps, but nothing more. I loved him, in a way, though at times he repelled me. Right now I had the fancy that he hated me with a dreadful hatred, but, of course, it was only fancy.

"I am convinced that, though I love this dream woman, I must relieve myself of her incubus or I shall go mad," I told Caleb. "She is awfully real to me, Mr. Farhm."

"How will you rid yourself of her?" He didn't seem surprised, didn't think me strange; and I thought I read fear in his voice, not of me, or for me, but for some other reason—some reason I couldn't even guess at.

"I am always grasping her by the throat with one hand, while she presses the dagger against mine," I explained. "I have never really tried to choke her, because I love her. At least, in my dreams I have always loved her."

"Who is to say where realities and dreams are divided?" asked old Caleb hastily, with an old man's fury, I thought. "Go on! Go on!"

"I've an idea," I said, "that if I can go to sleep with the intention of dreaming and of putting aside my love for Sybil, I can bring myself to choke her to death. If I can, she will die in the dream—and perhaps I shall never dream of her again."

"And suppose, in the dream, she thrusts the dagger into your throat?" he demanded.

That startled me.

"That's odd," I said. "In the dream I just had she spoke of that; said that if she ever really stabbed me, I would die. Well, I'm all right now, Mr. Farhm. You need your rest. Please go back to bed. I won't dream again to-night."

I escorted him to the door, which, this time, I did not lock. Now I sit at my writing desk, trying to anticipate what will happen when I go back to sleep—if I dream the dream again—which I know I will. *I know it.*

Will I be relieved of Sybil forever if I can force myself to choke her life away? If she, in the convulsions of her body while I strangle her, stabs me with the dagger, shall I die?

If I live, after this next dream, I'll write it all down here. If I die, you'll know that Sybil thrust the dagger home. I wonder, if that should be the case, if any marks will be found on my corpse—the sign of her victory?

You see, I am thoroughly sane. I know Sybil isn't real to any one but myself, as she must have been real to Herman Panzer, who created her.

And now I have finished—perhaps only for to-night, perhaps forever. I don't feel emotional about it. Either way I am satisfied, for I have lived a full life.

Good night.

IT GIVES ME a queer thrill to read those parts of George Styne's last story which state that some hand other than his own shall write the story's end. It makes me feel, somehow, like an instrument of his fate. But, then, aren't most lawyers instruments in the fates of their clients? My own name doesn't matter. But I was counsel for the defense in the case of the State of New York versus Caleb Farhm, charged with the murder of George Styne.

There was no question of Farhm's guilt in my mind. He stabbed Styne to death; stabbed him in the throat with a dagger as Styne slept. That is fact.

I wonder what Styne was dreaming? I wonder if he dreamed that Sybil had the point of her dagger against Styne's throat when old Caleb drove his dagger home?

I guess it's just as well we don't know things like that.

But how can I help wondering, knowing what I know? I know what, it seems, George Styne never knew. Caleb Farhm was interested in Styne because Styne was a writer, but Styne seems never to have asked him why.

And now I'll try to end this story as Styne would have ended it if he had lived.

Twenty-odd years ago, Caleb Farhm created, in a story he wrote, one character whom he loved passionately. It is the story of *Pygmalion* and *Galatea* all over again. For, after a lapse of years, old Caleb's character became very real to him—a sort of dream love. He made the mistake of telling a few people when he first came to Northport, and the fact that those people remembered kept old Caleb from going to the chair, sent him to an asylum instead.

But he did kill George Styne.

He killed him because of overpowering jealousy. For his dream sweetheart had not changed with the years, as old Caleb had. She was still young. So was George Styne.

Caleb Farhm killed Styne for two reasons: because he was jealous, and to keep him from "slaying" Sybil, heroine of "My Lady of the Tunnel," which old Caleb wrote twenty-odd years ago under the pen name of Herman Panzer.

The lawyer in me believes Caleb Farhm insane. I wish the human being in me *knew*.

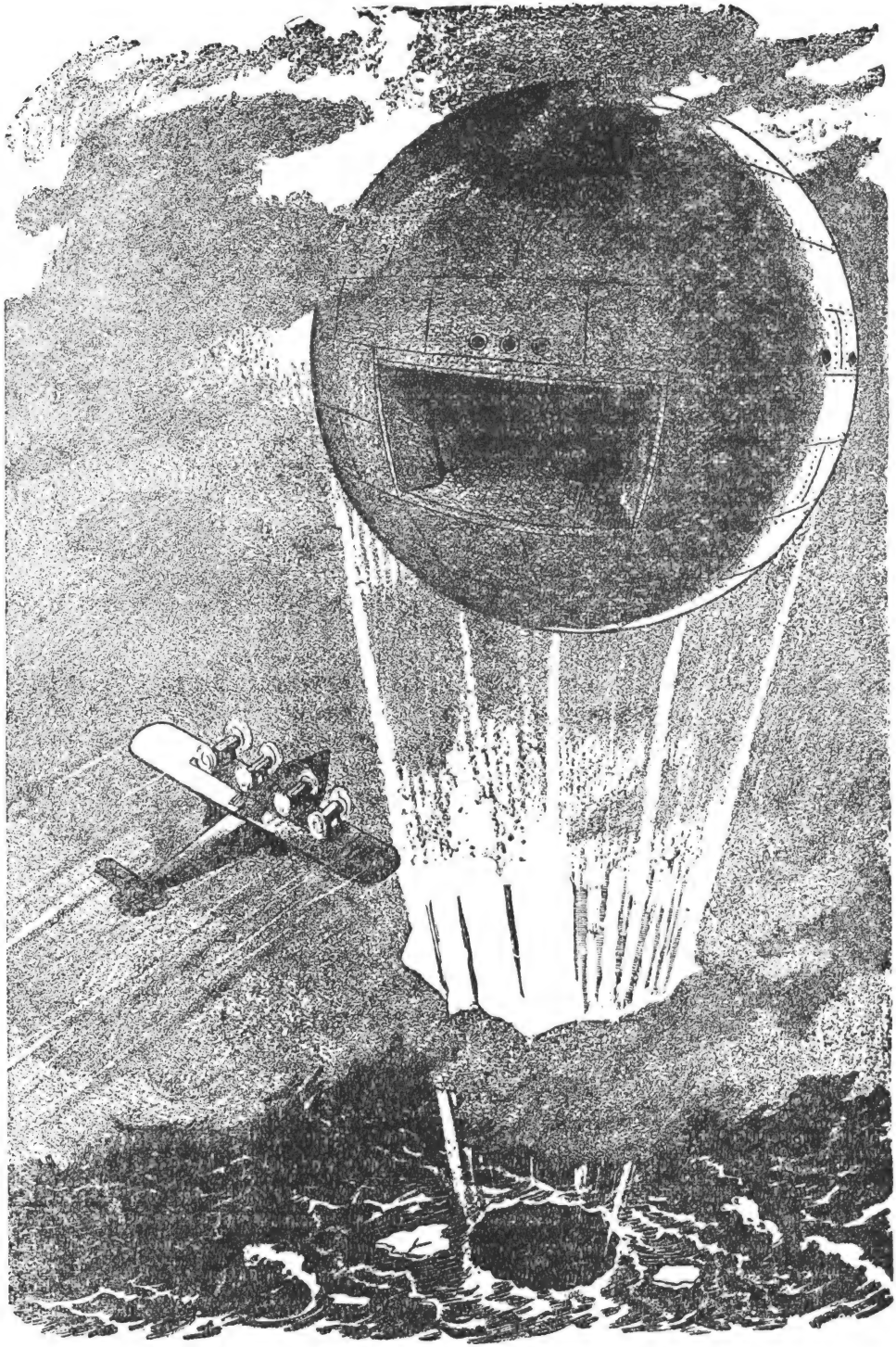
Needles

A short while ago a girl of twenty-two began to complain of a pain in her left leg. There seemed to be no cause for it, yet it became increasingly painful and annoying. At first she made light of it, but as days went on and it did not improve, she went to a doctor about it.

X rays showed a small sewing needle lodged in the flesh of the upper leg, very near the skin. It was easily extracted.

Nine years before, the girl had swallowed the needle. There had been no ill effects, and the doctor had advised leaving it alone. In the intervening nine years the needle had worked all the way through to the flesh of the leg.

A dog once had a porcupine needle enter the back of his head and work out through the eye. After a period of months, sight was regained.



The hangar doors slid open—and the plane was pulled steadily inside!

TELEGRAPH PLATEAU

by Harl Vincent

Caught in the Vacuum, Swept Forward into the Unknown.

AFTER a few seconds of fruitless dial twisting, Graham removed the head set from his ears and took to examining the tubes and connections. A puzzled frown drew his brows close together when he had finished, for everything was in perfect order.

But the radio receiver was as dead as a herring. Worse, it had developed a death rattle, a sort of a ghastly, fluttering whisper that blanketed the ether on all wave lengths.

Graham untangled his long legs with sudden vigor and strode into the pilot's cabin, ducking through the low communicating door. The frown had given way to an expression of blank incredulity.

"Perry," he said, "the radio's out of commission."

The pilot, not taking his eyes from the sea of white fog beneath the plane, asked grimly: "Can't you fix it?"

"No. That's what strikes me so funny. The set itself is O. K.; it seems that something has gone wrong with the air."

"It sure does," Perry grunted, wrenching at the controls. "And not only the air that carries your signals, but the air we're flying in. We're losing altitude fast, and the ship won't climb out of whatever is dragging us down."

Graham's jaw dropped, and he squinted at the billowing mist which now seemed so near. The 5-A-7, fastest amphibian plane of the North Atlantic Air Transport Service, was falling into the sea.

"Cripes, Perry, this is about where the others disappeared!"

The pilot kicked at the rudder. "Just about," he agreed. "And what's more, we're swinging to the north. Can't even keep her to her course."

There was no change in the smooth pur of the motors, no loss of air speed, but the controls were useless. The ship was nosing down sharply and heading toward a point where the fog was thickest. It was as if some invisible pilot had taken the controls from Perry by force and was taking them to an unknown destination on the surface.

Perry cut the ignition, but the motors continued to fire; in fact, they revved up slightly faster than before.

Then Graham shouted: "Look! A waterspout!"

Directly ahead was a column of water that thrust up out of the fog and flung itself into the heavens to an enormous height. Not straight upward, but curving swiftly to the west as it broke into spray that shimmered in the sunlight. There were no clouds overhead, only the low-lying mists below. This was not a tornado formation.

"That's no ordinary waterspout," muttered Perry. "It holds to the

same diameter all the way up to the spray, and there's no whirling. It ought to whirl and be funnel shaped! Damn queer!"

Graham, repressing a desire to blurt out his own misgivings, said nothing. Queer! Why, these happenings of the past two days were more than that; they were crazy! Impossible, many had said.

First there had been the *Icelandia,* in her usual perfect condition when she left Harbor Grace. Flying at six thousand feet with a full cargo and passenger list, she had been in constant radio communication with headquarters, as usual. Then, only a few hours out, her signals had ceased to come in. And with three radio transmitters aboard!

A swift rescue plane had gone out after her at once, the 5-A-13. This, too, vanished in the same mysterious manner. Some of the old-timers had shaken their heads and said it was her unlucky number—that she was a fated ship.

After that was the *Stockholm,* carrying six hundred passengers—the loss of the *Icelandia* had been kept out of the news broadcasts, so they went unwarned—and an enormously valuable cargo. She had gone the same way, with a sudden cessation of radio at about the same point in the north lane. Two rescue planes went out after her, and had not been heard from since.

Apparently disaster had overtaken all five vessels at the same lattitude and longitude.

In more than nine years of operation since the first air liner took off in 1942, North Atlantic Air Transport had never lost a vessel until now, never a passenger or a sack of mail or item of cargo. The officials became frantic. All scheduled takeoffs were canceled. But the influence of N. A. A. T. would be sufficient to keep the news from the broadcasts temporarily. For it to become public would be fatal.

After a hurried consultation of experts, the 5-A-7 was selected to make a final desperate flight in the effort to solve the mystery. She was too small to be of any use in rescue work, but she was very fast, and an amphibian besides. If her radio went dead, as had the others, she could at least land on the surface, whether it be of ice or water, and cruise around in the suspected region to search for wreckage or other evidence of the disasters and return to report on the probable cause. At least, that was the presumption.

All the old-timers grinned and agreed that the 5-A-7 had a lucky number. In a body they volunteered for the job.

Only three were chosen—a minimum crew. Frank Perry as pilot, a serious-minded and studious chap who was nevertheless one of the best navigators in the outfit. Aubrey Graham as radio operator. Some of the disrespectful old-timers called him "Beanpole" occasionally, but they'd have had a fight on their hands had they dared to use that first name of his. As mechanic there was Joey Dugan, an expert in his line if there ever was one, but a wistful-faced and undersized youngster who had once been compelled to spend a year in the mountains. Lungs.

Graham frowned anxiously now when he thought of Dugan. The lad was up in the motor runway, knowing nothing of what was going on in this God-forsaken stretch of ocean.

Just then the speaking-tube whistle blew, and Dugan's voice came floating down. "Hey, Perry! What the devil? There's no ignition at

all, but all three motors are hittin' on every cylinder!"

The pilot turned his face to the mouthpiece. "I know," he said. "Better come down here, Dugan."

"Aye, sir." The lad had served his apprenticeship on one of the big air liners, where discipline is strict.

Perry faced Graham. "Do you see what I see down there?" he asked.

The waterspout had vanished. Strangely, no water had fallen back through the fog to the sea. It had all flung upward and away, and was entirely dissipated in the air. Graham had noted that, but he had not seen what he now saw, less than a mile ahead. He rubbed his eyes and blinked a few times. Where the base of the waterspout had been was a yawning black hole in the fog, a hole that seemed to go down through the heaving white mist and into the ocean itself. There was no doubting that.

He said grudgingly: "I do see it, yes. But I don't believe it."

"Gosh, I do." Dugan's voice broke the ensuing silence apologetically. "Somethin's comin' out o' that hole, too."

Graham looked. The 5-A-7 was shooting down toward that black rim of a devil's bore like a thing possessed. And something *was* coming up from out the depths!—a huge gray sphere, a thing many times larger than the biggest N. A. A. T. liner.

Perry, little moved as usual, and thinking only of the scientific aspects of the thing, remarked: "Some force from underneath blew away that circle of fog. It'll close in, you'll see."

"Your idea!" snorted Graham. "What about that big ball—ever see anything like that?"

"No-o. And it must have something to do with the column of water. Possibly with the disappearances."

The nose of the 5-A-7 rose sharply, and the ship seemed to lose flying speed with a sudden lurch. Again Perry worked frantically at the controls without result. The throb of the motors lowered rapidly in pitch; they were about to stall.

And the big gray sphere came up steadily before them.

Graham, looking down, was able to see the lower curve of the thing, and observed with amazement that it was covered with riveted metallic plates like the hull of an ocean-going vessel. In the rolling mists underneath was the opening from which it had emerged, truly an orifice with sharply cut edge. Through it, far below, was a glimpse of drift ice and the tossing surface of the ocean itself. Another yawning opening, a vast, circular bore into the very bosom of the ocean, with drift ice and waves breaking at its rim, as if hurled against a breakwall. Graham was seized with a desire to pinch himself.

The others were watching the sphere. Suddenly Dugan exclaimed: "Hey, Perry, there's a door openin' in the side of it!"

It was true. Only half true, in fact, for two doors were slowly swinging apart, exactly like the great doors of the N. A. A. T. hangars. And the 5-A-7 headed directly for the gradually widening opening.

Perry, still yanking at the controls, gave up in disgust as the motors coughed despairingly and died. Then it was as if the little amphibian had landed on a runway and was coasting forward under her own momentum. But no runway or other support under her landing gear was visible; nothing was below them except the few hundred feet of air that separated them from the blan-

ket of fog. The sphere, with its huge doors fully opened now, loomed immediately ahead.

"So this is what became of the others!" the pilot marveled. For once he had no technical explanation on the tip of his tongue.

"And we'll soon know all the details," Graham said dryly. "But we won't be back at Harbor Grace tonight."

"Nor ever, probably," gloomed Dugan. "We're inside!"

Supported and propelled by some inexplicable force, the 5-A-7 swept into the utter darkness of the sphere's interior. It rolled on a short way and lumbered to a stop.

"So now what?" Graham whispered. He felt something cold and hard pressed into his hand.

"One of the pistols," said Perry softly. "May need it. Here's one for you, Dugan."

The young mechanic answered "Aye, sir," out of the gloom, and Graham thought he heard his teeth chatter.

For a time there was dead silence, save for the breathing of the three in the small cabin. You could cut the darkness with a knife. Then Graham's stomach came up into his mouth with that sensation one experiences when a plane drops into an air pocket or when descending in a high-speed elevator. He heard the others gasp.

And he said awedly: "Cripes! They're dropping us into the hole!"

In his mind's eye he visioned that inconceivable pit he had seen in the ocean's surface, with waves beating against a rim that seemed not to exist. Perhaps Perry could explain *that*.

"There's a light, sir," Dugan told the pilot.

Through a side window of the cabin, and seemingly a long way off, was a dim gleam, as if a door in some far wall was partly open.

"We'll go out and investigate," Perry decided. "No use staying cooped up in here, waiting for something to happen."

"Me first," said Graham eagerly. "I'm the tallest, and can help you two down."

He swung out of the door, and, clinging to one of the float struts, dangled his long legs in search of solid footing. He found it after a moment, and tested it with his weight, still hanging to the strut. Outside the sphere, he remembered, there had been nothing substantial underneath.

"O. K.," he breathed, and the others came down.

They proceeded cautiously toward the distant light. None of them had any delusions regarding their chances against an enemy so powerful as to own and operate a machine like this enormous spherical vessel, but each was possessed of the urge to see the thing through to the end, and to learn as much as possible before an actual clash came.

The floor beneath them was springy under their tread, as if made of extremely thin steel plate with supporting beams not too closely spaced. And it was vibrating, as if in response to the impulses of high-speed rotating machinery.

Suddenly there was a flood of orange light so intense as to blind them to all that lay beyond it. A sharply defined boundary marked the place where the light left off and the darkness began. They knew they were being watched from the other side of that boundary, but could see nothing of the watchers. The three men halted irresolutely, feeling like criminals in a police line-up.

"You will drop your pistols," a gruff voice ordered, "making sure the safety catches are on. Resistance is useless, and will only make immediate death certain for you."

Graham's eyes narrowed as he tried to pierce that wall of darkness. He resisted a mad impulse to empty his pistol into the obscurity from which the voice had come, then let it clatter to the floor plates along with Perry's and Dugan's.

The ring of light closed in on them until the darkness was just before their eyes. Then Graham saw naked arms reach out of nothingness with clawed hands that grasped Dugan's throat. The lad let out a gurgling cry.

That was too much. Graham lunged into the gloom, his long arms flailing. His fists contacted solid flesh again and again, and brought forth grunts of surprise and pain. Faintly he heard Perry calling out to him, telling him to lay off.

Something struck the back of his skull with tremendous force. Nothing mattered after that.

II.

WHEN GRAHAM awoke, it was to the accompaniment of a thumping head and a taste that he could only liken to that of an old rubber boot. For aching minutes he lay without moving a muscle or opening his eyes. He was striving desperately to recall what had occurred. Remembering finally, he raised one lid cautiously.

The light was poor and of strange quality, seemingly from a red-orange source almost like that of a photographic dark room. He opened his eyes and lifted his head. He was lying on a not uncomfortable cot, and he now saw dimly a barred door.

At his movement a voice whispered his name. It was Perry's.

Graham jerked himself erect and saw a second cot on the other side of his cell. The pilot lay there, propped up on one elbow.

He asked softly: "How do you feel?"

"Rotten," said Graham. "Where are we, anyway? At the bottom of the ocean?"

"We're underneath the bottom, believe it or not. What's more, a strange race is living down here in what must be a large city."

Graham pondered this, fingering gingerly the surgical dressing on the back of his head. "How long have I been out?" he asked.

"Hours. They gave you a hypodermic and doctored up your head. I've been asleep for a long time since that."

Thinking was still somewhat difficult for Graham, but his headache was subsiding. After a long silence he said: "*Under* the bottom, you tell me. That means there are caverns —submarine ones. And people are living here, different from us? They the ones that captured us?"

"Right. And wait till you see them."

Graham's eyes were becoming accustomed to the orange-lit gloom. He now saw across the great room that tier upon tier of barred cells lined the wall. They were prisoners in a huge jail not much different from those in their own country.

"Dugan all right?" he inquired.

"Yes. The poor kid was scared half out of his wits, but they treated him pretty gently, at that. He's in the next cell."

"And the others—from the liners?"

"All here, I guess. There are hundreds in this place; men, women, and children."

"Cripes! What are we being held for?"

It was a question they were to ask many times; and Perry did not reply, for the orange illumination was brightening swiftly, and there came the sound of marching men in the gallery.

Guards halted before their cell, and the door was opened. "Come out," a voice rasped. Perry and Graham stepped into the eerie light of the gallery. Dugan left the adjoining cell at the same time.

"You three are to go before the high priest," they were told.

Graham looked at the nearest guard and experienced a distinct shock. Colors were unnatural in the orange light, of course, but it was not that which caused the shivers to chase down his spine. It was the fellow's eyes more than anything; they were large and unblinking, with expressionless pupils that must have been three times the diameter of the average man's. Fish eyes. This guard, as were they all, was even taller than Graham—probably six feet six inches. Naked save for a loin cloth, his skin showed a sickly lemon hue in the orange illumination. By daylight it must have been ghastly white. Chest deep; arms long and dangling; legs unbelievably skinny and bowed. Furtively examining the others of the guards, Graham saw that they were all marked by the same characteristics. And they talked English!

The prisoners were marched down the gallery past the long row of cells, from which scared faces peered out at them between the bars. In one cell Graham saw a delicate slip of a girl who was sobbing wretchedly. He went suddenly sick.

From the gallery they were taken into a long passage which sloped sharply downward. Four guards preceded them, and five more brought up the rear. At the end of the passage a door opened into a circular room with high, arched ceiling. Sitting cross-legged on the cushions of a small raised platform in the middle of the room was a man who stared at them coldly with fish eyes like those of the guards.

"You will draw near to me," he said curtly, "that I may converse with you."

Graham answered hotly: "What right——"

A wave of the seated one's hand silenced him. There was something commanding in that gesture, and, besides, one of the guards had prodded Graham's ribs with his mace.

"It is for me to question, not for you." Unblinkingly, the one on the platform regarded them.

Under the spell of his gaze, they approached the platform, saying nothing. The face of this man was as sickly hued as those of the guards, but it was a look of keen intelligence and a haughtiness that bespoke high authority. An oddly shaped turban surmounted his head, and he was attired in a flowing robe which, orange-lighted from above, was a muddy brown in color. The fingers of his left hand, long and tapered, toyed with a metal ornament which hung on his breast.

"Since you three are the latest arrivals, it is necessary that you be apprised of your position and assigned to your tasks. I am Ithen, high priest and ruler of Kafeja, and I have brought you to my realm with a definite purpose in view. In due course of time that purpose will be revealed to you, and you shall be —freed. Meanwhile, you are to consider yourselves not as prisoners, but as guests. However, we of Kafeja will insist that you remain as

paying guests; you are to pay for your sustenance with labor, each in accordance with his particular qualifications. Therefore you will, each of you in turn, advise me as to your abilities."

"Huh—not prisoners!" scoffed Graham. "Sleeping in cells!"

Ithen silenced him with a frigid stare. And Perry was nudging him to warn him. They must learn as much as possible regarding this realm of Ithen's, and play for time to make plans for escape, if such a thing were possible.

It seemed that the priests had charge of everything in Kafeja.

Perry explained that he was an air pilot, but added that his hobby was scientific research. He was assigned to work with the priests of the laboratory, and two guards led him from the room.

Dugan told haltingly of his experience with internal-combustion engines, and was sent to the priests of power generation.

"I'm a radio operator," said Graham.

Ithen eyed him from head to foot. "Since we are in need of no radio operators," he said, "I shall assign you to the priests of the fisheries. Take him away, guards."

For the next half hour Graham entirely forgot his indignation in the wonder that came to him. Two of the guards led him to a car that hung on a cable, and this car slid rapidly through a long tunnel and out into an enormous cavern where sights met his eyes that he would never have imagined in his wildest fancies.

The cable swung over the city of Kafeja, and, except for the myriad of orange lights overhead, Graham would have thought of himself as flying over a surface city of a strange world where the only colors were browns, and reds, and yellows. Nothing was white, since white light is composed of all colors of the spectrum, and here half of the spectrum was missing. Many objects were black, and Graham wondered how many of these might show as blue, green, or violet if exposed to white light.

Aside from the colors, the city was still a strange one. There were no streets or avenues, but only the spaces between the irregularly arranged groups of circular dwellings. Some of the flat-topped, round edifices were large, some small; there was no uniformity to anything in Kafaja. It was like nothing so much as a huge "tank farm" of an oil field, but arranged with no regard to symmetry.

A maze of cables stretched over the rooftops, and these crossed and crisscrossed in all directions. Cars traveling along these cables made frequent stops to load and unload, then vanished in the tunnels which honeycombed the cavern walls. There seemed to be no other means of transportation.

In approximately the center of the city was an open space like a public square. Here there was a spiral promenade that wound upward and inward from the ground level to a flat, circular space from which rose an astonishing monument. This was in the shape of a huge sphere which rotated slowly on an inclined axis, and to which were appended a small sphere, close by, and a distant larger sphere that was lighted brilliantly to an almost pure yellow. Undoubtedly representations of the earth, the moon, and the sun!

Graham would have questioned the guards regarding the monument, but they had been so sullenly silent that he refrained.

Outside the city itself were broad fields extending to the cavern walls, fields of stunted vegetation of no kind that grew on the earth's surface, and obviously cultivated intensively. Kafejans were at work in these fields, and numbers of the captives. At one point Graham saw a fenced-in area where a great many queer animals were grazing. He had only a fleeting glimpse of these, but they appeared to be a species of huge lizard, as large as cattle, but with long tails and flat heads. They crawled flat on their bellies with stumpy legs outstretched from their bloated bodies.

Then the car in which he was riding had slid into a tunnel mouth and was thundering through a dark passage.

When it came to a stop, the guards turned him over to a brown-robed priest, who led him to a large cavern that was walled with smooth metal like the hull of the sphere which had captured them. Hundreds of men were laboring in this cavern in a fishy stench that was almost unbearable. Most of the workers were Kafejans whose uncovered bodies were spattered with oil and blood from the carcasses they were cutting up, but many were captives from the surface world who had stripped to the waist, but retained their trousers. Their bodies, coppery colored in the orange illumination, formed a strange contrast with the sickly hue of the Kafejans. A number of the brown-robed priests supervised the work, and were as dictatorial to Kafejan as to captive.

"You are not to work here," said the priest who was leading Graham across the slippery floor.

These were welcome words to the erstwhile radio man, whose stomach revolted at the odors and the slime and the very look of the sea monsters they were cleaning and hacking to pieces. "Where then?" he asked.

The priest grinned maliciously. "You go out into the depths to fight these monsters and to bring them in," he said.

They had passed through a low archway, and now emerged in another cavern which was like the interior of an enormously enlarged battleship turret. Graham saw what appeared to be breech mechanisms of a dozen giant guns, and large ovoids of steel that might have been projectiles for these guns.

Many of the unrobed Kafejans were here, and they crowded close to examine the newcomer. The priest drove them back with a storm of angry gutturals that were quite unintelligible to Graham, then selected two from their number and bid them draw near. They came groveling.

"These are to be your companions," he told Graham. "They are Igor and Freng. Igor speaks your language imperfectly, the other not at all. I am sure you will enjoy their company."

"Company! You mean——"

"You are to go with them in the next *varshar,* which ventures into the valley of the devilfish, there to battle the largest which can be found, and to bring back the spoils. No more than that." The priest turned on his heel and left the way they had come.

Igor grinned, showing muddy-brown fangs. "What you name, red man?" he asked in not unfriendly tone.

"Graham."

"Good, Grayum. You new here, yes? You see now much funny. Go after *varsa.*"

"Varsa?"

"Um—priest call deveelfeesh."

"Oh." Graham could think of nothing else to say. If he was to go out in one of those metal ovoids with these two freaks, he'd have to go, and no getting out of it. As a matter of fact, he was curious as to the means used in fishing the depths of the ocean, and actually looking forward to the experience with a measure of excitement.

Igor and Freng moved to one of the ovoids which rested in a cradle before the open breech of one of the "guns."

"This *varshar,*" said Igor.

Graham looked up at an ovoid that was some twenty feet in length and probably twelve feet in its greatest diameter. He saw that the outer surface was smooth, seamless. A circular door in its side was open, and the interior was lighted with the usual orange glow. There was no sign of propeller or rudders, else he might have taken it for a small submarine. No, it was a projectile.

Igor said: "You go up, Grayum."

To be shot out into the depths in this thing *would* be an adventure. All Graham's doubts evaporated, and he was up the steps and in through the door in nothing flat. The two Kafejans followed, and the door was bolted to its seat from inside.

"Let's go," said Graham, looking curiously about him.

III.

THE SHELL of the ovoid must have been enormously thick, for there was hardly room for the three of them to move around amidst the clutter of machinery in the single apartment. Graham commenced examining the mechanisms with avid interest, but was stopped by Igor.

"No time look now," said the Kafejan. "We start quick. Here, lie down this place." He indicated a shelf at the end of the compartment, a shelf that was provided with three grooves, each of sufficient size to hold a man.

Freng flung himself face down in one of the grooves with his head toward the gleaming, curved wall, and Graham followed suit. Igor was at his side in the next moment, his fingers resting on a series of small levers that were arranged at the end of the groove in which he lay.

There came a heavy jar and a lurching forward of the ovoid, the hiss of compressed air. Graham knew then that the "guns" were no more than huge torpedo tubes, and that the ovoid had gone through into the sea. There was a swift sense of increased pressure, a hollow echo in his ears. Then the lights in the ovoid went out, and the machinery started with a sharp, rising whine.

He had been wrong; this *was* a submarine, though he had not the faintest idea as to its method of locomotion. It lunged forward under its own power, whatever that power might be. The great torpedo tubes were in reality only air locks which were provided for the launching of these small vessels into the enormous pressure of the depths.

The gleaming wall before Graham's eyes suddenly became transparent, and he saw the ocean bed for the first time. It was a sight he would have gone a long way to witness.

No daylight could penetrate to this depth, but the scene was clearly visible in an orange glow like the artificial lighting of Kafeja. It was incomprehensible to Graham; he knew that the long-wave-length light rays near the red end of the spectrum had much less penetrat-

ing power than the shorter ones at the violet end. And he did not learn until later that this illumination of the depths was accomplished by a broadcast electrical energy which made suspended matter and even molecules of water luminous by its excitation.

He was looking out over an area of rugged peaks and wide valleys. On the peaks were forests of slender, perpendicular vegetation; in the valleys, broad, sandy plains with occasional clumps of marine plant life that grew close to the bottom rather than extending to a great height upward, as did that on the peaks.

Constantly crossing his field of vision, and often coming very near to the transparent forward end of the ovoid, was a multitude of swimming things, most of these being queerly shaped, and quite unlike the fish that are to be found near the surface. Twice a finny monster that was bigger than the ovoid came to look them over, with saber-toothed jaws opened wide. Each time Igor pulled a lever, and there was a jet of inky fluid which drove the big fish away. After a second visit he did not return.

The ovoid was progressing down a gentle slope at a rapid rate now, keeping to a distance of about twenty fathoms from the bottom. Many huge crabs could be seen on this slope, great fellows of the hard-shelled variety that moved with dignified deliberation.

"Good place find *varsa*," said Igor. "*Varsa* eat *birji*."

Graham presumed that *birji* were these huge crabs.

Suddenly Freng hissed excitedly: "*Seshu, ig seshu!*"

"Hoh!" gloated Igor. "Big fella, big deveelfeesh. See, Grayum."

They had reached the bottom of the slope, and there, crawling on three of its arms, with the remaining five waving in the orange-lit waters, was a huge creature of the *genus cephalopoda*. A giant octopus, such as those of which Graham had heard tales, but never believed to exist. This specimen must have been thirty feet in diameter if laid flat with arms outstretched.

The ovoid nosed down and came to rest on the bottom directly in front of the octopus. The creature saw them at once and halted its forward movement, standing with powerful jaws opened wide, staring eyes regarding this intruder balefully.

"Cripes!" breathed Graham. "What do we do now?"

"Wait for him attack," Igor stated calmly. "Then go out, catch big fella alive."

"Go out? Into this pressure of water?" Graham could not credit his hearing.

"Hoh! Not in water. Na, na, you see." Igor was manipulating his levers, inching the ovoid closer to the monster.

Graham's scalp twitched with the rising of his hair.

Then the huge octopus charged the ovoid. Graham yelled as its great bulk flung against the thick glass before him; he had a glimpse of the cavernous mouth and the sinister eyes before his vision was shut off. The ovoid rolled drunkenly, and there was a slithering crunch as the creature's jaws closed on the nose of the vessel and slipped off. Igor jerked at his levers, and the ovoid seemed to settle down into the mud of the bottom. The lights flashed on.

"Now make ready go out," said Igor. He started a machine which had not operated previously, then turned off the lights once more.

Looking out, Graham saw that

the octopus had backed away in surprise. And as he watched, a bubble seemed to emanate from the ovoid, a bubble of air that grew rapidly in size until it inclosed the ovoid and the monster in a hemisphere that was bounded only by water. Pushing back the ocean itself until there was a clear space, air filled, where they would be able to fight the ghastly creature—or try to!

Graham gasped: "But, Igor, the pressure! We must be hundreds of fathoms deep, and the air pressure must be terrific out there!"

"Na, no pressure. You see. Same here as Kafeja."

"What raised the water, then? What holds it back?"

Igor shrugged, pointing to the machine, whose intricacies were as mysterious to him as to Graham. There was the hiss of compressed air flowing out into the bubble.

"But," Graham objected, "why can't you kill him from inside this thing? With a torpedo, or a ray, or something?"

"Must bring back alive. Meat no good if not."

"So what?" Graham could conceive of no practical method of capturing the monstrous creature alive. Already it had charged the ovoid a second time, and even now its tentacles were slithering over the outer surface of the forward end.

Nasty things, those tentacles, as thick as a man's waist where they joined the ugly body, and tapering down to sensitive, curling ends. Covered with suction cups on the under side, cups that clung to the thick glass tenaciously.

Igor said: "You see, Grayum. Take this and this. We go out."

He thrust a four-foot length of steel rod and a coil of rope into the unwilling hands of the ex-radio man.

The door opened, and the three of them were outside. Graham took a deep breath and found the air good. His ears sang a bit, but there was no sensation of greatly excessive pressure. He looked up fearfully at the arched wall of water overhead, then forgot all about it as a tentacle came sliding down over the top of the ovoid and curled around his neck. Yelling in horror, he banged at it with the steel rod, and it uncurled.

Igor shouted approval. Freng was screaming, "Hoh! Hoh!" and pounding away at another tentacle as he flung his coil of rope over the creature's body, which towered above them. The monster charged him, but he eluded the thrashing tentacles nimbly. Igor took advantage of this distraction of the thing's attention to fling another coil of rope about the body and make it fast.

Graham saw how it was done now, and rushed in with steel rod flailing and rope ready. The creature turned and charged again, this time on Igor. Freng made fast another loop of rope in the meantime.

Suddenly the octopus changed its tactics and backed away. Freng made haste to run the end of his rope through a ring that was set in the hull of the ovoid. He made it fast just as the monster reached the limit of the air bubble's diameter. Graham blinked as he saw it back against a solid wall of water it could not enter. That wall held fast as had the wall of the tube down which the capturing sphere had come; it held against the creature's bulk, as unyielding as if it were a wall of steel. The octopus made a hideous screeching sound and charged again.

This time Graham looped his rope around the bases of two tentacles

and drew it tight. He was breathing hard from his exertion and with the excitement of battle. This was real sport; no further thought of the danger of it entered his mind, now that the horror of it had worn off. He drew the other end of his rope through one of the rings on the ovoid. Extra coils had been dumped out through the door before they came out, and he grabbed up one of these.

Then he froze in his tracks, for a bloodcurdling shriek rang out within the narrow confines of the bubble. He looked up to see Igor raised high in the air by one of those slimy tentacles which had wound around his middle. Freng was clubbing the monster with his rod, but this seemed not to daunt it at all.

The enormous mouth of the thing was open, and the tentacle that held Igor was curving down to thrust the wriggling man between those jagged-toothed, crushing jaws. Graham lunged forward and flung his rod with all his might. It was a lucky throw, for the rod, turning end over end, entered the monster's mouth and wedged in an upright position. The jaws closed down, but only a little way, when the rod became firmly embedded in flesh and bone. The creature screeched with the pain of it, and dropped Igor into the mud.

Both Freng and Graham made other ropes fast then, and Igor was soon with them. It was not long until they had the monster trussed up like a turkey and lashed to the ovoid.

"Hoh!" said Igor. "You do good, Grayum. We all finish. Take big fella back now."

The trip back was somewhat different from that coming out. The bubble collapsed slowly when Igor stopped the machine which had produced it. And they returned at a leisurely pace on account of towing the monster, which must be kept alive.

Freng lay on his back in his groove and went to sleep. But Igor was voluble. Graham tried to draw him out; tried to learn all he could about Kafeja and its inhabitants, about the great sphere which had gone to the ocean's surface to capture them, and about the ovoids and their method of operation. But Igor could talk only of the fight with the monster and of his rescue. He was extremely grateful, and vowed that he would return the favor, though being somewhat vague as to the manner in which it might be returned.

They saw a number of octopi on the way back, but none so large as the one they had captured. The sea was filled with life, most of the swimming creatures being of species never encountered near the surface. There were fish with eyes at the ends of long antennæ that projected from their heads, enormous squids that squirmed on the bottom, and many giant crustaceans. Graham saw one of the latter that was much like an ordinary lobster, but with a body as long as a man's, and with claws that would have cut a man in two. He judged that the depth was very great.

At length they reached their objective, which showed as a curved metal wall that bulged from the side of a sheer cliff. The ovoid did not enter through a tube similar to the one it had been discharged from, but plunged into an enormous air lock, where it came to rest.

There were several minutes of waiting while the water was emptied from the lock, and then the door of the ovoid was opened. They

were greeted by a great clamor when they came out. A dozen Kafejans were in the lock, exclaiming at the size of the cephalopod as they loosed the lashings. Igor was not insensible of the praise heaped upon him, but he affected an easy nonchalance of manner, and led his companions immediately to the room from which they had started the voyage.

Here they found considerable excitement. The priest who had assigned Graham to the ovoid was there, and with him was Ithen, the high priest. Ithen was berating the other priest, but left off his tirade when he saw Graham.

Igor bowed from the waist and muttered something in his own tongue, but Ithen waved him aside with impatience, going instead to Graham.

He seemed to be greatly agitated, and grasped the American's arms, peering intently into his face. "You are entirely unharmed?" he asked.

Graham chuckled; this sudden solicitude somehow struck him as being funny. "Not a scratch on me," he said airily.

"It is well," the high priest intoned. "And now you are to return to your quarters for the remainder of the waking period."

Ithen turned again to the other priest and ripped out a stream of harsh Kafejan gutturals that somehow sounded far from approving.

"Him get hell for send you out," Igor whispered. "Ithen want no harm come your kind. Want keep alive and well."

Again Graham chuckled. Whatever his origin, a man of another race learning to speak English is bound to pick up the cuss words, and Igor was no exception.

But there was food for serious thought in the Kafejan's last words. The priests wanted to keep the captives alive and healthy, did they? Graham sobered, thinking involuntarily of the octopus. That, too, had been kept alive—up to a certain point.

IV.

THE PRISON QUARTERS were more spacious than Graham had imagined, and included, besides the cell blocks, large mess rooms and kitchens, a series of reception rooms, and a well-stocked library. The guard who had accompanied him from the fisheries left him in the latter.

There were volumes here printed in many languages, and on every conceivable subject from child rearing to astronomy. Examining some of the books, Graham found identifying marks on their title pages, such as "U. S. S. *Rover*," "H. M. S. *Leicester*," "Scandinavian-American Line," and one, "N. A. A. T. *Icelandia*," a recent addition. There were none he could find that were printed in the language of Kafeja.

He wrinkled his brow in thought. Obviously the priests of Kafeja had engaged in their kidnaping operations for a period of years, and had captured steamships as well as aircraft; it had been more than a decade since the *Rover* was reported lost at sea. The secrets of many such disappearances were to be found here in Kafeja, but the purpose of it all was extremely puzzling to Graham. Certainly the Kafejans were not thinking of making war on the outside world; there were not enough of them for that. Nor could they be holding the captives for ransom, for the gold of the nations would be of no use to them here. What then?

A cough from behind one of the book racks interrupted his medita-

tions, and he moved around the end of the case to see who was there. The cougher was a middle-aged man who sat reading at one of the tables, and whose arm was in a sling. Graham addressed him.

"Hello, stranger. Mind talking to a fellow captive?"

"Glad to." But there was no cheerfulness in the man's voice or in his gloomy stare as he closed his book. "My name's Townsend."

"I'm Graham, of N. A. A. T."

"Oh—one of those they brought in last night."

"That's right." Graham had never heard such a sepulchral voice nor seen so morbid a look on a man's face; he thought Townsend must be an undertaker.

It developed that he had been just that—a "mortician," he called it—in Canton, Ohio, and that he had been a prisoner here two years, having been a passenger in a private trans-oceanic plane which Graham recalled as having been reported lost at sea about that long before. He was forced to work in the fields by the Kafejans, and had broken his arm a week ago. Yes, the priests were taking good care of him.

"But, my friend," he said solemnly, "they are doing it for no good reason. We are doomed, I tell you—all of us are doomed. Each day some of our number vanish, never to be seen again."

"What becomes of them?"

"None of us know, but it is firmly believed by many of the prisoners, including myself, that those who disappear are sacrificed to the pagan gods of Kafeja by the priests."

Graham had considered this possibility, but dismissed it as too fantastic. "Let's talk about something more pleasant," he suggested. "Since I'm new here, and you're an old-timer, so to speak, I wish you'd tell me more about this place and the inhabitants. You must have learned quite a bit in two years. I'm in the dark about it all."

Townsend shook his head. "They do not talk much, but I do know this: the priests rule Kafeja with an iron hand. Kafeja is a hierarchy, and has been for countless generations. There are twelve hundred of the priests and about twenty times that many subjects. This place is not, as you may have supposed, the remains of some lost continent like legendary Atlantis; the people are descendants of a race that was driven from the surface two thousand years ago. They were forced to live in caverns and subterranean passages, and the ancient grudge against the surface peoples has been handed down from generation to generation. As near as I can make out, they came originally from the Scandinavian peninsula, and were forced deeper and deeper into the earth's crust, until finally they reached this point under the bed of the ocean. I presume you are aware of the fact that this region of bottom is known as Telegraph Plateau, are you not?"

Graham had not known this, and he admitted it.

"Well, that is what oceanographers call it. It begins at a point between the Grand Banks of Newfoundland and Iceland, and covers a vast area where the ocean varies between two hundred and fifty and two thousand fathoms——"

"Yes, but the people—tell me more about them."

Townsend looked around to see if any one was within earshot, and lowered his voice. "I've overheard some mutterings," he whispered. "There is much dissatisfaction now among the common Kafejans, and a growing mistrust of the priests.

The subjects are beginning to have doubts even of the legend."

"The legend?" Graham was becoming more confused as his informant went on with his gloomy dissertation.

"I forgot; you had not heard of it. The legend is one that has been drilled into the common people by the priests for many generations, and has to do with the coming of the surface visitors—ourselves. All through the ages these Kafejans have entertained hopes of once more dwelling outside—in the open air. You have undoubtedly seen their monument which expresses this sentiment. Well, the legend has it that their migration to the land of sunshine is to commence when surface people equal in number to their own shall have been brought to Kafeja as sacrifices to the gods of the ancients. And now that the time is drawing near, they are whispering among themselves; the commoners, for some reason I have been unable to learn, believe that the priests are deceiving them. There will be trouble, you mark my words." Townsend's long face lengthened even more. "But none of *us* will be here to witness it," he concluded morosely.

Graham said: "Cheer up, man. You haven't actually seen any of these sacrifices, have you?"

"No, but I have seen many of the captives taken away. And then there is the legend."

At that moment two of the almost naked guards hove into view and approached Townsend. "You are among those chosen for this period," one of them told the man.

The swarthy color drained from his face, leaving it the same sickly yellow as that of the guard. But Townsend was game; he straightened his shoulders and accompanied them without a word. His gaze, as he looked back at Graham, seemed to say: "I told you so."

After he had gone, the library was an empty, echoing place, and a measure of Townsend's gloom descended on the lanky radio man. He sat for a time racking his brains for an explanation other than that to which he had just listened; then, more uncertain than ever, and becoming restless, he sauntered into an adjoining room, which happened to be the gymnasium. A Kafejan guard was here, and two husky captives were performing on the parallel bars. The former looked at Graham askance; the two captives jabbered at him in French, of which he understood not a word. He passed on into the assembly room.

Before long the prisoners were streaming in from their labors, some utterly discouraged of mien and sagging with weariness, others not seeming to take the matter at all seriously. Numbers of Kafejan guards were here, but they paid no attention to the captives so long as order was maintained. Graham started looking for Perry and Dugan.

The hall was almost filled before he located the pilot. Perry's eyes were shining; it was obvious he had spent a profitable time with the priests of the laboratory. Graham drew him aside and told him of his own experiences, winding up with the story of Townsend.

"Hm-m-m," said Perry when he had finished. "The business of the legend will bear investigating. But, Graham, let me tell you, these priests are nobody's fools when it comes to knowledge of science, they have discovered the secret of gravity, and are using a similar force in almost all their activities. The ovoid you were in was propelled by

a repulsive force of this nature; the bubble in which you fought the octopus was produced by degravitizing the vast weight of water above. Compressed air was released in it at atmospheric pressure to enable you to breathe. The waterspout was produced in the same manner, and the sphere which captured us was lifted through the opening it left behind by a similar gravity-repulsing energy. Believe it or not."

That explained many things to Graham, but still left him cold. He was more interested in the possibility of escaping from the place than in the science of the priests. "So what?" he asked dryly.

Perry sobered. "You mean what about ourselves?"

"Sure. What are we here for—and how do we get out?"

"I haven't learned much that will be of help," admitted Perry. "But there are some things. For one, these priests are not interested in the gods of the ancients; they are scientists. I suppose they have kept up the pretense of priesthood to fool their subjects into continued submission, but their prime interest is in physical research. They had to become scientists ages ago, when the earthquakes cut them off from the outside world; they were forced to discover means of generating their own oxygen, of providing artificial illumination, of growing crops, and of conquering the enormous pressure of the waters which hem them in. They have done much and will do more, you'll see."

Graham was not to be sidetracked. "But, Perry," he said, "there are about a thousand captives here, maybe more. Are we to stand idly by and see the worst happen to them and to us? We've got to think up some way of getting out of here."

"Right. But it'll take a little time, I'm afraid. We'll have to watch our step, learn what we can, and then make plans."

"Meanwhile, some are being taken every day—like Townsend. Look, Perry—do you think you can learn how that sphere is worked, and how to get to it?"

"I believe so; it is near the laboratories. And that's our only chance, at that." Perry was thoroughly aroused now. "I'll go after the dope to-morrow."

The gong rang then, and there was a rush for the mess rooms, finishing their conversation.

They did not see Dugan until after they had finished their meal of fish and unfamiliar but savory vegetables. When they did encounter him, it was only for a moment, while they were being returned to their cells. But Graham lost no time in questioning him after they had been locked in for the sleeping period, hugging the cell wall on the side nearest to Dugan's, and talking to him through the bars. He could not see the mechanic, but could hear his every whisper.

"What do you know?" he asked him.

"Gosh, they've got some engines down in the power plant. They're gravity motors, run by chargin' and dischargin' with attractive and repulsive forces. They——"

"Never mind that," Graham interrupted. "Let's talk about the mess we're in, and how to get out of it. Did you hear anything from other prisoners?"

"No, but I did see a fight in one o' the engine rooms."

"A fight? With a prisoner?"

"No. A Kafejan mechanic attacked one o' the priests and was shot down. They had a big argu-

ment, but I couldn't understand a word."

"Shot down? Was the mechanic killed?"

"Gosh, yes! Burned to a cinder."

Perry was crowded close behind Graham at the cell wall. "Ask him what kind of a weapon the priest used," he whispered.

Graham relayed the question.

"Oh, it was a sort o' pistol that shot a roarin' red flame. Ugh!"

A guard was coming down the gallery, and the men ceased talking. Graham and Perry drew back from their door as the guard halted before it. Then Graham had a good look at the Kafejan.

"Igor!" he exclaimed.

It was his friend of the ovoid. Smiling, he explained his presence.

"Yes, Igor have friend who fix new job. Igor guard now."

A wild hope was forming in Graham's mind. "You asked for this job yourself?" he inquired. Then, as Igor nodded: "What for?"

"Maybe Igor can pay Grayum for save life."

"How?"—softly.

"Will see. But only Grayum. Others not count. Now no more talk at door. Igor no care, but old guards hear. Will change cell if hear talk."

The big Kafejan left them then and continued his march down the gallery.

"Now what do you think of that?" breathed Graham.

"I think we'd better take his advice. We can lie on our cots and talk there without being overheard. It's only talking between cells that's risky." Perry had moved into the shadows.

They lay for a long time after that discussing the situation, but reaching no conclusion whatever. Igor passed their door several times, and each time paused to look in. But he did not speak to Graham again.

"You made a good friend of him," said Perry. "What's more, he may be a lot of help."

"Uh-huh." The orange glow had dimmed to the deeper, reddish gloom of the sleeping period, and Graham was hardly awake.

He dozed off, then partly roused at a soft call from Perry.

"Yes," he answered thickly.

And the last thing he heard before falling sound asleep was Perry's drawl: "Do you know, I believe this orange light of theirs has something to do with it. I'm going to look into that to-morrow——"

V.

TIME WAS MEASURED in Kafeja by means of gyroscope-operated clocks which functioned by the earth's rotation. A full day, comprising one waking period and one sleeping period, was thus of the same duration as that to which the captives were accustomed, so it made little difference to them that the Kafejan timepieces had ten major divisions instead of twelve, and that each of these "hours" had one hundred subdivisions in place of the usual sixty minutes. The prisoners counted their days by labor and meal times and by the darkened periods for sleep.

Evidently Ithen had changed his mind entirely about the assignment to the fisheries, for Graham was separated from his friends after the first meal of the second waking period and sent to the fields outside the city with about fifteen other prisoners.

He found one man among this group of captives whom he knew—Sven Nystrum, an old-timer with

N. A. A. T., and recently appointed mate of the liner *Icelandia*. The two managed to get together when the cable car landed them near the patch of cultivated ground in which they were to work.

All told, about fifty men were in this field, all except their own group being Kafejans. Two priests were in charge. Being closely watched, it was necessary for Graham and Nystrum to converse guardedly.

"Your first day?" Nystrum asked.

"Second. They had me octopus hunting yesterday."

"What do you think of it all?"

"You should ask me," said Graham. "You've been here longer; what do you think?"

"There's a hundred different hunches among the prisoners, but mine is that the priests are putting one over on these other poor slobs. I figure the priests are planning to skip out of here and leave their under dogs behind."

"But what about us? What was the idea in bringing us here? I don't get it at all."

Nystrum dropped his voice to a whisper. "Ah, that's the joker. I figure there is something they lack in order to live on the surface. And whatever it is, they're getting it from us."

"You mean——"

"I don't know what, but——"

One of the priests was approaching, and they ceased talking. The field was a slushy expanse of dwarf bushes on which grew a bright-red fruit about the size of ordinary plums. They had been given hampers, and were engaged in gathering such of the fruit as was soft and elastic to the touch. The priest examined the contents of their containers, nodded approval, and passed on.

"Captain Morris went out yesterday," Nystrum said feelingly when he had gone.

"They took him away with those others?"

"He fought them off until they paralyzed him."

"Paralyzed him! I thought they wanted to keep us alive and well." This did not fit in with what Graham had experienced the previous day.

Nystrum shrugged. "Maybe it's only temporary, this paralysis. I don't know. Anyway, I've seen a dozen go out that way."

Graham thought this over and could arrive at no explanation. "It seems as if trouble is brewing between the priests and the others," he offered after a period of silence. His hamper was growing weighty.

"You bet. Watch the Kafejan workers and you'll see signs."

Watching furtively, Graham saw that this was so. But to him it seemed that the sullen looks of the laboring Kafejans were directed at his own kind rather than at the two priests. He remarked on this to Nystrum.

"By George, you're right," his friend answered. "Funny, too. It was the other way round yesterday."

Suddenly an uproar arose at the far end of the field, and they saw that a number of the Kafejan workmen had rushed a group of prisoners. The priests were running toward the scene of the disturbance, shouting frenziedly.

Graham and Nystrum dropped their hampers, and, hurdling the rows of bushes, went to join the besieged captives.

But the priests were there before them, clubbing the queer pistols they carried, and going in like whirlwinds of fury. Heads cracked right and left, and they were the heads of Kafejans. The priests were defending the prisoners!

"Look!" Graham exclaimed. "They've got the captives free. And the Kafejans are massing against their priests!"

Nystrum said solemnly: "We'd best keep out of it."

A half dozen of the Kafejan workers were stretched motionless on the wet earth, and the rest of them converged swiftly on the two priests. One of the priests raised his voice angrily, but was shouted down by the excited laborers. The captives, for the moment protected by the waving pistols of the priests, were banding together and drawing away from the storm center. Graham and Nystrum joined their ranks ready for anything.

The Kafejans charged, and the pistols of the priests spat flame that roared mightily and brought agonized shrieks from the foremost of the attacking party. Graham saw three charred bodies toppled headlong. But the maddened Kafejans still came on. Again and again the searing flames spouted, and other screaming natives were burned down. But now they were upon the priests, and Graham saw one of them slump to his knees and bend backward. Then he was trampled underfoot by the howling mob.

But the second priest dodged the rush of natives and sent in a steady blast of flame as they wheeled. It was a devastating fire, and mowed them down like sheep. Only about ten were left on their feet now, and these turned and ran, yelling and whimpering.

Graham saw that a cable car had stopped at the landing platform. From it came another priest with two guards, and these rushed to the assistance of the first priest. All four ran after the fleeing Kafejans.

The group of captives stood irresolute, frightened speechless. But Graham saw in this circumstance the opportunity he sought.

"I can run that cable car," he shouted. "Come on, all of you! It's our chance to escape!"

Nystrum grinned delightedly. "It's a go! Snap into it, everybody, before they come back from the chase."

Graham bent over the body of the fallen priest and saw at once that his neck was broken. He removed the flame pistol from the stiffening fingers and pocketed it.

By the time they had all the captives in the car the priests and the two guards were returning. Two fingers of flame reached out, but failed to reach them before Graham had found the starting lever. The cable car started with a lurch, and was speeding over Kafeja toward the far wall of the great cavern.

"Where do we go from here?" asked Nystrum, who sat beside him.

The other captives were demonstrating noisily, some of them jubilant, others doubtful, and some bewailing the fate they were sure was to overtake them.

"Depends on where this cable leads," Graham replied. Then, with a jerk of his thumb over his shoulder: "Better talk to them back there and get 'em to quiet down. There'll be work to do, and some scrapping, like as not."

Nystrum argued with their companions while the car sped toward a tunnel mouth that loomed ahead. Graham saw the semicircular meeting place of the Kafejans, which faced a balcony that stood out from the wall some twenty feet above the cavern floor. On the balcony was an altar and a replica of the monument in the square. They were nearing the domain of the priests.

Then the car had plunged into red semidarkness, and Graham drew

back on the lever to slacken their speed. He was glad he had watched the operator of the car he had come out on, glad that the control was simple.

No real plan was in his mind, and he was beginning to entertain some doubts as to the wisdom of their move. But anything was better than submitting tamely as they had been doing. Besides, there was now a chance to learn something definite regarding the mysterious activities of the priests.

He saw brighter light ahead, and slowed the car almost to a stop. A landing station was there before them, and the end of the tunnel. He stopped the car.

"It'll be too dangerous to go on," he called back to the others. "What do you say we get out here and look for a side passage—we've passed several of them."

Some of the prisoners agreed eagerly, others half-heartedly. It was plain that many of their number would prove to be of little help in a concerted move for freedom. But they dropped, one by one, from the car door to the floor of the tunnel, and followed as Graham led the way back through the red-lit gloom.

Presently they came to a side passage where the light was better and of the familiar orange tint. Graham entered this cautiously, and saw that it led a long way into the rock wall without turning. He called to the others to follow.

A faint throbbing of machinery was in their ears, and this became more noticeable as they progressed. Graham imagined that they were not far from the power plant. Nystrum was at his side when they came to the first cross passage, which they inspected carefully before going farther. The cross passage, too, was empty.

There was some grumbling among those following, but whispered words of caution relayed back were effective in silencing them. It was no time to be disagreeing among themselves.

Then, a short way ahead, a hurrying priest turned into the passage. He was bound in the same direction as theirs, so did not see them. Catfooted, Graham sprinted after him and brought him down by judicious use of his pistol butt. A quick search of his robe brought forth another of the flame pistols, and now Nystrum was armed.

Graham's spirits rose.

"The noise is growing fainter," said Nystrum when they had gone a short way farther.

What he said was true; evidently they had passed by the generating plant, for the hum of machinery was definitely behind them now, and was hardly noticeable.

Suddenly the passage widened out and they emerged on a balcony that lined a small cavern which inclosed a circular pool. Evidently a bathing place of the priests. Fortunately none of the priests were here, so they moved along the balcony until they came to another small passage. They entered this and proceeded at right angles to the direction in which they had come.

"We're getting nowhere fast," said Graham. "And——"

What he had been about to say was cut short by a terrific shock that rocked the passage and threw him flat. A thunderous roar arose, then died down to a menacing rumble. A second shock followed, and other thunderings which at last trailed off into silence.

Some of those behind set up a clamor.

"Cripes!" yelled Graham. "It's only a slight earthquake! Now be

quiet before we give ourselves away."

He scrambled to his feet and pressed on with Nystrum beside him. The others trailed along.

And then, a hundred yards ahead, a score of priests streamed into the passage.

Graham found the release of his pistol and sent its flame roaring in their direction. Nystrum duplicated his action, but the flames were far short of their intended marks. The range of these weapons was not greater than half the distance, and the priests were retreating rather than advancing.

"Come on, Nystrum—after them!"

Graham suited action to his words, hoping to get within range. In this narrow passage they should be able to hold their own against the superior force, provided the charges of their pistols held out.

But the priests fell back, keeping out of range. They were not armed with flame pistols, but held short tubes in their hands that were funnel shaped and terminated in large bulbs at the small end.

A chorus of shouting came from the prisoners in the rear, and the sound of hand-to-hand fighting.

"We're caught!" panted Nystrum. "Other priests have attacked from behind!"

"I was a damn fool to think we could get away with it," Graham said bitterly. But he kept reaching out with the flame from his pistol in the hope that he was gaining on the retreating priests.

It was no use. Always the flame fell short, and after a time there was no flame at all. The pistol was empty. And so was Nystrum's.

The priests in front, seeing this, stopped their retreat and began to advance. Bedlam reigned behind. Priests and prisoners were in a desperate battle. The captives, some of them, were putting up a good fight, but to no avail. They were outnumbered and quickly overpowered.

Graham and Nystrum plunged forward to meet the robed ones who were closing in on them. At least they could leave their marks before being taken.

But an unknown and invisible energy was radiating from those funnel-shaped weapons, an energy that was to render them helpless. Graham first sensed it when he stumbled repeatedly. A leering and ghastly face was before him, the unhealthy, fish-eyed face of a priest. He wanted to drive his fist into that face and see it go down in the haze that was forming to blur his vision. But he was unable to raise his arm. Curses rose to his lips, but no sound came forth. His step was lagging; it was as if he was loaded down with a burden he could not carry. He slumped to the floor of the passage, helpless.

Turning his head with an effort, he saw Nystrum in like condition, saw the rest of the prisoners being marched off by the priests who had recaptured them so easily.

Only a grunt escaped him, but it was fraught with disgust.

VI.

THIS WAS NOT the paralysis of which Nystrum had spoken. Graham felt the strength returning to his limbs as soon as the energy of the funnellike weapons was shut off. But by this time his hands had been securely tied behind his back. Two of the priests jerked him to his feet and prodded him into movement.

Their way led to the prison quarters, and Graham soon found him-

self in his own cell—alone. He did not see where they had taken Nystrum. He heard some shouting and shuffling in the gallery below, and the clang of barred doors. Presumably Nystrum and the others were being locked in their cells as was he.

A lot of use his break for liberty had been! He saw now that he had only succeeded in making a fool of himself, and fools of the rest of them. Once more he had allowed his hot-headedness to overcome his better judgment. Now, under suspicion, he would be watched more closely than before. Perhaps, even, he would be among the next to be chosen to "go out."

He puzzled anew regarding the situation. From what he had seen in the field back there it was obvious that the relations between the priests and their subjects were highly strained. It was clear that the Kafejans were demanding the lives of the captives, and that the priests were preserving those lives. Temporarily, at least. And for what purpose? Graham could not believe that the purpose was a humanitarian one.

Trying to reason it out, he marshaled such facts as he knew or could construct from observation. Apparently the Kafejans had first captured surface people ten years or more ago. The first ones they took had evidently been English or American, and the priests as well as most of the guards and a few of the commoners had learned the language. The hope of all Kafeja was that their people might some day return to the surface world from which they had originally been banished. Their religion, their legends, were based on this hope.

The priests had constructed the great sphere and commenced their kidnaping operations on a large scale. The legend was to the effect that a captive must be had for each inhabitant of Kafeja. But that was next to impossible—the northern air lanes would not be used now since the recent disasters; the priests must know that. Besides, the prison quarters were not of sufficient size to house more than twelve or fifteen hundred.

That was it! Graham rose from his cot when the idea struck him.

Nystrum had sensed something of this. The priests were figuring on leaving Kafeja without their subjects. A man for a priest; there were twelve hundred of them in all. None for the ordinary Kafejans. And the commoners were getting wise. That was the cause of the growing unrest.

But why the man-for-a-man business? It didn't make sense. Surely if the priests wanted to escape to the surface, they would be able to do so, and without making any pretense at fulfilling the provisions of the ancient and ridiculous legend. Unless, as Nystrum had suggested, there was something lacking in them——

A form darkened the barred door. It was Igor.

"You do bad," the Kafejan whispered. "You do much bad, Grayum. For be leader of rest, you be call by Ithen. Him much bad."

Graham chuckled. He had forgotten about Igor, and here was an ally who might well be of some help. "What will he do, Igor?" he asked.

"Not know. Maybe kill. But Igor try stop."

Here indeed was gratitude, and from one who should, by the word of the legend, be an implacable enemy. Graham asked softly: "Why are we prisoners here, Igor? And what are they doing with those they take away? You tell me."

The Kafejan looked both ways along the gallery before replying feelingly: "Priests fool us, Grayum. Legend say you people come as offering to gods. Not so. Priests bring not enough. They not send one to altar. Not know what they do to those take away. But not do what legend say. That sure."

"There's trouble among your people?"

"Much trouble. More as you think. Make plenty fight soon."

"What do you mean? Here?"

The Kafejan started guiltily. "Make quiet now," he husked. "Come other guards."

He moved from view, and Graham was alone again.

But things were happening on the main floor of the cell room. He heard loud voices and the tramping of many feet. Looking through the bars of his door, he could see a corner of the room, and he noted with amazement that the prisoners were being returned from their labors in large numbers, although it was yet early in the waking period.

What this portended he could not imagine.

Igor returned then in high excitement. With him was another guard, and there seemed to be an understanding between the two. A key rattled in the lock, and the barred door swung open.

"Must take to Ithen," said Igor. "You come, Grayum, and not be alarm. Much different now as before."

The guards hurried him to the main floor of the cell room, where the prisoners were being checked in, and from there to the assembly hall. Graham could get no further information from Igor on the way.

On the platform of the assembly room sat Ithen with thirty or more of his priests. And other priests lined the walls of the great hall; Graham had not seen so many of them together before. He judged their number to be at least five hundred; they outnumbered the guards many times. And flame pistols were in evidence.

The prisoners were coming in rapidly, and soon the room was filled. Graham saw Perry and called out to him.

"Silence!" thundered Ithen.

But Perry had seen the tall radio man, and was worming his way to where he stood with his two guards.

"Believe it or not," the pilot panted, "I've found out plenty this morning! Tell you about it later." He nodded toward the guards.

"No time later," said Igor. "Tell Grayum now. Guards no hear."

The second guard nodded approval of his words.

"Boy, you did make a friend," Perry enthused. "And you'll need him, you'll see. All hell is popping in Kafeja."

"You should tell me," returned Graham. "Guess I made some of it myself. But what did you learn?"

Perry lowered his voice. "I know the way to the sphere and how to operate it. I've been on board the 5-A-7 and brought these along from our stores."

He had thrust a number of hard, cylindrical objects into Graham's hand. Magnesium flares! Was Perry out of his head?

"Put them in your pocket," continued the pilot. "It's their sight—the orange illumination. White light blinds them! Don't you get it?"

Graham did get it. Those fish eyes of the Kafejans were capable only of seeing reds and yellows and oranges. The full spectrum was to them a blinding glare that caused their pupils to contract shut or that

paralyzed their optic nerves. Probably they had come to this state through the necessity of many generations of their ancestors living in entirely darkened caverns, or in those illuminated only by subterranean lava flows where the light would be distinctly red. Later, when they had progressed scientifically, they had been forced to the artificial light they now used.

Kafejans were blind in white light! Graham fingered the flares lovingly; he knew that the pulling out of their lighting fuses would ignite them instantly when necessary.

"Perry, you're a darb," he gloated.

"Another thing," said the pilot, "is this business of the legend. The priests are not sticking to their promises at all; they're planning on getting out of Kafeja and leaving the others in the lurch."

"I know——"

"Yes, but you don't know why. They're expecting an upheaval of the ocean bed which will destroy Kafeja, and they've figured out the time it is to occur. They can't wait; they must get away within the next forty days—so *they* think."

"What do you mean—so they think?"

"They've figured wrong, Graham. I checked their calculations and found an error, clever as they are. This big earthquake is due any day now."

Graham stared. "So what?"

"We'll get out, all of us. To-day, what's more."

Ithen was shouting for order, and Igor warned them into silence. The gaze of the big Kafejan guard was eloquent. He had overheard and understood.

The high priest was reading names from a scroll. Dugan. Wells. Nystrum. Fred Collins. G. C. Collins. Graham. Many others. As the names were called, those answering to them were led to the platform.

Graham went up with Igor clinging to his arm.

Two young girls were in the group called, and they came sobbing. Ithen examined them first, peering intently into their faces, and then ordering them away. Graham protested angrily, but Igor held him fast.

"Not now," begged the Kafejan. "Later."

Joey Dugan was next, and Graham saw that the lad could scarcely stand. Evidently he had been beaten.

Ithen peered into his face as he had done with the others. Dugan swayed where he stood and clutched at his guard for support. The guard struck him brutally across the mouth.

This was too much for Graham. He wrenched free of Igor and was upon Dugan's assailant in a single bound. There was a quick, roaring flame, and the hot breath of it singed Graham's hair. He heard a moan and the fall of a body.

Igor had flung himself before Ithen's pistol to protect the man who had saved his life, and now lay a smoldering, charred heap at the high priest's feet. Graham's hands fell to his side, and he was suddenly sick inside.

Ithen raised the pistol again, but lowered it immediately.

"No," he said grimly. "On second thought, I shall wait; for your rashness you are to be reserved for a very special purpose. You may stand to one side until I have finished with these others."

Dully Graham watched as numbers of the captives were examined and taken away to that fate which

was so mysteriously veiled. He could see Perry down below, and Perry was motioning to him, enjoining patience.

When the first group had been led away there came an interruption. A delegation of Kafejans was demanding audience with the high priest.

Ithen scowled darkly, but, after a conference with his advisers, waved his hand to signify that the delegation might approach.

The leader of the delegation was a huge fellow, and he came boldly to face the high priest. His words were in his own tongue, but there was no mistaking their earnestness or purport. He spoke heatedly, and his gestures included the entire assemblage of prisoners. Graham did not need to be told that he was demanding the sacrifice called for in the legend, charging that the priests had broken faith.

Ithen rose, quaking with rage, and hot words of refusal came from his thin lips. The leader of the delegation answered with equal heat. And then came the blast of flame from Ithen's pistol. His accuser was a cindery mass, blackened beyond all recognition as a Kafejan.

Instantly pandemonium reigned in the assembly hall. The guards were leaving their posts, and the priests along the walls came to life. It was apparent that Ithen had anticipated something like this and had taken pains to be prepared.

One group of priests set out to battle the guards, and another group commenced herding the captives together to keep them out of the fighting. Queer how anxious they were to keep the prisoners from harm, thought Graham once more.

But Ithen had reckoned without the courage and determination of his people. They came streaming into the hall in ever-increasing numbers, and as soon as one fell before the withering flame, another was in his place. The guards, working with their friends outside, had opened the great doors of the prison quarters, and thousands were coming for the final accounting with the priests.

Perry leaped to the platform. "Now's our chance!" he shouted. "A flare, and we'll get out while the getting out is good!"

Seeing him, Ithen swung up his pistol. But Graham was too quick for him; he knocked aside the hand which held the flame spouter and went after Ithen with joy in his heart. His long arms worked like piston rods, and the high priest fell back under the rain of blows, his pistol knocked half across the platform.

But Ithen was no mean antagonist. While he knew nothing of the art of boxing, there was tremendous strength in his arms, and he closed with the lanky American bear-fashion. Feeling the pressure of those encircling arms, Graham knew he would have to resort to a trick if he was to best his gorilla-chested antagonist. He yielded suddenly as if giving way, and this threw the other off balance. Ithen's viselike hold loosed, and Graham had him where he wanted him.

A headlock and a quick twist, the cracking of bones, and Ithen went limp. There would be no more devilment from him.

Only then did Graham notice that the hall was strangely quiet, and that it was lighted brilliantly blue-white. Perry had set off one of the magnesium flares. Kafejans were groping their way aimlessly, and captives were staring open-mouthed at the platform.

"This way!" Perry was screech-

ing. "Follow us, and we'll all see our homes once more!"

A great shout came up from the prisoners, and they surged forward.

And then Joey Dugan came stumbling from a side entrance. He was ghastly white in the light of the flare, but two spots of angry color flamed in his cheeks. He almost fell into Graham's arms.

"God!" he gasped. "Oh, God, Graham, it's our eyes! They took me to a hospital where they were settin' to take out our eyes and graft them into the heads o' these damned priests! The Kafejans raided the hospital and I got away, else they'd have had mine."

The lad collapsed then, and Graham had to carry him as he followed Perry from the hall.

VII.

A BROAD PASSAGE that opened into the solid rock provided a means of speedy escape for the fugitives. They streamed in after Perry and Graham, hundreds of them, and officers of the *Stockholm* and *Icelandia* quickly organized into an orderly retreat what had started as a rout. Ahead of them, the passage was deserted.

"Probably won't be many Kafejans to run into," Perry said. "Most all of them are behind us. But that flare won't last forever, Graham. Better drop back and set off another to keep them from following."

Dugan had fainted on Graham's shoulder. He shifted the slight form and looked back at those following. He saw Nystrum shoving his way to the front. He, too, had escaped the priests's surgeons.

"Here, take him," said Graham, passing the lad to Nystrum's ready arms. "He's out, poor kid, and I have to be rear guard for a while."

Drawing back against the wall of the passage, he stood waiting as the fugitives swept past at a dog trot. There were more men than women, he observed, but most of the women were quite young. He remembered then that the *Icelandia* had carried a party of college girls who were starting a tour of the world. He thought grimly of what might have happened to them—what still might happen, if anything went wrong with their plans. A few children were here, too, some in the arms of their parents, others running along on skipping feet. All of them, old and young alike, were excited and in rising spirits—hopeful for the first time since their incarceration.

The two girls Ithen had sent from the platform went past arm in arm, laughing and crying in turn.

Then the last of them had gone by, and Graham planted one of his flares in the floor of the passage and drew the fuse. The usual orange illumination gave way to the vivid blue-white of burning magnesium. He ran on after the others.

The floor of the passage rose sharply and it soon widened out into a great room with arched roof high above. There was the sound of a conflict ahead, and Perry's voice rising above the din. Graham set off a second flare. By the time he reached the scene of trouble, he found it was over. Perry and a number of fugitives had subdued the four guards they found in the place. So far the way was clear.

Perry shouted to his followers: "The sphere is in the adjoining chamber, and the *Stockholm* is still inside it. They've made away with the *Icelandia* and some of the smaller ships, but the *Stockholm* will hold you all. My idea is that such of her officers as are left, man her and make her ready to take to

the air as soon as I bring the sphere to the surface. She'll carry you safely home!"

Shouts of approval drowned out his final words. "We'll follow in the 5-A-7," he said in an aside to Graham.

No Kafejans were in the cavern of the huge sphere, and the fugitives trooped in through the great doors which were open in the lower section of the big vessel's hull. There was only the one entrance to the inclosing cavern, and Perry lighted one of his flares in it before proceeding to the near-by controls of the gravity machinery. They were safe from pursuit until that flare had burned itself out.

"It was almost too easy—getting away like this," remarked Graham.

Perry answered soberly: "We're not out yet."

Looking up at the curved hull of the enormous sphere, Graham was awed at thought of the knowledge and skill that had gone into its construction, at the thought that this huge bulk could be lifted from the depths by a nullification or actual reversal of the force of gravity. It was almost unbelievable.

Most of the fugitives had entered the sphere, and he was left alone with Perry in the midst of a maze of machinery that suddenly whirred into life. An alarming idea struck him.

"Suppose they shut down the power plant below!" he said.

"Let 'em," returned Perry. "This gravity machine is self-excited. Makes its own power. They can't stop us now."

Graham looked up into the vast reaches above the sphere and saw a great circular door opening up there. Beyond it was blackness.

"The waterspout has started," breathed Perry. "We'll rise up through the opening it leaves behind. Come along, now."

"Everything's ready?"

"Sure."

Perry started for a small door at the lowest point of the sphere's hull. The large double doors through which the fugitives had entered were already closed.

Knowing Perry too well to question him further at this time, Graham followed. They entered a control room that was directly at the bottom of the huge vessel. Perry closed the door.

"Now," said the pilot, snapping on an orange light, "you'll see how much I learned about this thing in no time at all."

There was the throb of machinery above them as he moved a lever, a rising of the sphere with swift acceleration as he moved another. Then they were shooting up toward the surface.

A wall of water was all around them, held back by the mysterious gravity energy of the priests of Kafeja.

Perry said, as if talking to himself: "That last flare should hold out until we're in the open air. Then let 'em shut off the energy down there."

"Will the sphere support itself?" asked Graham.

"Yes, once it's above the water. The energy from below acts only upon the water itself, boring the opening through which we are rising. But the sphere's own generators provide the force which actually lifts us. You see, it would be impossible to construct a vessel as large as this which would withstand the pressure of the depths. Hence the flinging upward of the water to provide a passage that's pressureless. If that passage should close in on us now—good-by."

Graham looked down through the control-room windows, through that ever-lengthening, water-walled tube to the dwindling light circle that marked the open door to Kafeja. No one was there to close that door.

He saw that the water around them was turning blue. The light of the sun was reaching down to them now.

Nystrum came into the control room, announcing that Dugan had recovered and was quartered in the best stateroom of the *Stockholm*. "And everything is set for their take-off," he concluded. "I'm coming with you two on the 5-A-7—to replace Dugan."

Perry nodded approval.

The water around them was lightening rapidly in color. Graham saw a swift-moving form that turned over and revealed flashing rows of teeth only a few feet from the wall of the water tube—a shark. They were nearing the surface.

Then came a tremendous upheaval. The sphere rocked mightily. The circle of light below was snuffed out instantly, and the waters of the ocean closed in around them.

"The earthquake!" choked Perry.

A window of the control room crashed in under the pressure, and they were flung back by the deluge that came pouring in.

Tossed about like corks, they rode out of the control room on the surging flood. Battling desperately in the darkness, they reached the circular stair which led to the reaches above. The stair careened and swayed beneath their feet, making progress upward most difficult.

"We're afloat!" Perry exulted. "The sphere will sink, of course—but if only we have time to get our own ships out, we're all safe."

Graham could only gasp, "Cripes!" as he toiled upward.

When at length they reached the deck on which the *Stockholm* and the 5-A-7 were berthed, they saw daylight. Nystrum greeted it with a shout, Graham with a chuckle of satisfaction.

The great doors had been opened, and men were running back from them to the air liner. Outside was the sea and the sunshine—safety.

It would be tricky work launching the *Stockholm* into the air from this heaving deck. Perry went up under her control cabin and argued himself hoarse advising the impatient captain to wait until the sphere had settled deeper into the water and thus stabilized.

Then he made for the 5-A-7 with Graham and Nystrum.

The wait was nerve-racking. The sphere sank slowly, but as it settled the rolling became less noticeable. When the waves were lapping at the landing deck, the *Stockholm* roared out through the great doors and vanished from sight. And the 5-A-7 leaped out after her.

Below them, the sea seemed to bulge upward as they gained altitude. The *Stockholm* was streaking off rapidly to the southwest, but Perry, zooming up to two thousand feet, circled the spot where the big sphere was tossing about. Suddenly the heaving waters burst into spray, and the sphere was spewed out above a boiling whirlpool, only to sink back and go down as if snatched by the hand of Neptune. A sullen roar came up from the depths.

"And that," said Perry solemnly, "is the end of Kafeja."

He headed the ship for Harbor Grace without further ado. Nystrum went up to the motor runway, Graham to the radio cabin.

With headphones clamped to his ears, it did not take Graham long to find out that the *Stockholm's* oper-

ator had beat him to it in reporting the news to Harbor Grace. Already the air was full of it, and praises of the 5-A-7 and her crew were not lacking. Grunting his disgust, Graham switched off his receiver and returned to the pilot's cabin, where he seated himself beside Perry.

After a time, when the little amphibian was speeding swiftly homeward at five thousand feet, he started asking questions.

"Perry," he began doubtingly, "you don't believe those priests were actually transplanting *eyes,* do you?"

"I know they were. They had about fifty of their own kind fixed up that way already, with eyes from our sort, eyes that could see in white, blue, green, or purple light, as their own eyes could not."

"But—to do a thing like that! None of our own surgeons would be able to."

"You forget," said Perry, "that they had worked on the problem for generations. And students of science who could devise forces such as those which kept our engines running without ignition and those which drew N. A. A. T. vessels into their sphere willy-nilly, should be equal to an accomplishment of surgery like that."

"The devils!"

Graham thought some more. "They were planning to get just enough for themselves and leave the common trash behind in Kafeja," he ruminated. "And to establish themselves in England or America. I can't see why they couldn't have worn orange glasses to shut out the end of the spectrum that would blind them. Why not?"

"They'd have to use closely fitting goggles to exclude any and all rays not suited to their vision. Such goggles would be uncomfortable, and, besides, would mark them as different from our kind—make them most conspicuous. The priests of Kafeja were proud."

"For comfort and pride they'd do —what they were doing." Graham shuddered. It was inconceivable that these things had been, that at least fifty of his fellow men had suffered and finally died in Kafeja.

"Right," was Perry's solemn reply. "And we were between the devil and the deep blue sea down there, with the Kafejans wanting our lives and their priests our eyes. If it hadn't have been for the under dogs finding out about the priests' double dealing just when they did, we'd not have escaped."

It was typical of Perry that he took no credit himself.

More silence, broken only by the smooth pur of the motors.

Then Graham asked his final question.

"How in time did you ever learn all those things? About the gravity energy, the orange light, and the effect of white light on a Kafejan's eyes—how to get to the sphere and to operate it."

Perry's thoughts were on other matters. Knowing well these fits of abstraction, Graham waited patiently until he replied:

"There was a machine in the laboratory, one that was capable of dragging a man's secrets from him, a thing they were experimenting with. A machine that searched a human brain for its inmost knowledge and translated its very thoughts into intelligible impulses. A mind-reading mechanism, if you please. They had me doing their dirty work in the laboratory; they'd never have told me a thing. But I grabbed off one of the priests and got him into the cage of this machine when none of the others was looking. I learned

about Kafeja from him; then I gagged him and trussed him up and tossed him in a closet."

"You son of a gun!" said Graham admiringly.

Perry's gaze was dreamy. "What's more, I'm going to build one of those machines, and a gravity apparatus," he concluded, "as soon as I get home."

Graham felt like talking, but knew it was no use now. The pilot had gone into one of his trances; he was inventing something again, and nothing could interrupt his train of thought. Sauntering into the radio cabin, the operator switched on his transmitter. If he could get in a word edgewise with that guy on the *Stockholm,* he'd ask after Dugan.

Strange Case

During the World War, a German soldier was wounded in the head. Through the application of good surgery, his life was saved, but pressure on that part of the brain controlling sleep paralyzed its normal functions.

Since that time the man has not slept. He works in the daytime. At night he patronizes the night clubs of his city as a haven from the loneliness of deserted streets. At those rare intervals when he feels tired, he rests—wide awake and altogether conscious. He is in good physical condition. Aside from his sleeplessness he is normal. Scientists of all countries have puzzled over his case.

His only cause of complaint is the cost of his living. To spend every night in a night club is expensive. It takes all he can earn in the daytime to pay for the occupation of his long, lonely nights.

BE A RADIO EXPERT

Many Make $40 $60 $75 a Week

J. E. Smith, Pres., Nat'l. Radio Institute, the man who has directed the Home Study training of more men for the Radio Industry than any other man in America.

I'll Train You at Home in Your Spare Time for RADIO · TELEVISION · TALKING MOVIES

Set Servicing
Spare-time set servicing pays many N. R. I. men $5, $10, $15 a week extra. Full-time men make as much as $40, $60, $75 a week.

Broadcasting Stations
Employ managers, engineers, operators, installation and maintenance men for jobs paying up to $5,000 a year.

Radio Factories
Employ testers, inspectors, foremen, engineers, service men for jobs paying up to $7,500 a year.

Aircraft Radio
Radio is making flying safer. Radio operators employed through Civil Service Commission earn $1,620 to $2,800 a year.

Talking Movies
An invention made possible by Radio. Employs many well-trained Radio men for jobs paying $75 to $200 a week.

Television
The coming field of many great opportunities is covered by my course.

If you are dissatisfied with your present job; if you are struggling along in a rut with little or no prospect of anything better than a skinny pay envelope—clip the coupon NOW. Get my big FREE book on the opportunities in Radio. Read how quickly you can learn at home in your spare time to be a Radio Expert—what good jobs my graduates have been getting—real jobs with real futures.

Real Opportunities Ahead for Trained Men

It's hard to find a field with more opportunity awaiting the trained man. Why in 1932—the worst year of the depression—the Radio Industry sold $200,000,000 worth of sets and parts! Manufacturers alone employed nearly 100,000 people! About 300,000 people worked in the industry. In 1932, broadcasting had its most profitable year. It's a gigantic business, even in the worst business years! And look what's ahead! Millions of sets becoming obsolete annually. 17,000,000 sets in operation that need servicing from time to time! Over 600 great broadcasting stations furnishing entertainment and news to 100,000,000 people. These figures are so big that they are hard to grasp! Yet, they are all true! Here is a new industry that has grown quickly into a commercial giant.

Get Into This Field With A Future

There's opportunity for you in Radio. Its future is certain. Television, short wave, police Radio, automobile Radio, midget sets, talking movies, public address systems, aircraft Radio—in every branch, developments and improvements are taking place. Here is a real future for thousands and thousands of men who really know Radio. Get the training that opens the road to responsibility, good pay and success! Send the coupon now and get full particulars on how easy and interesting I make learning at home. Read the letters from graduates who are today earning good money in this fascinating industry.

Many Make $5, $10, $15 a Week Extra in Spare Time Almost At Once

My book also tells how many of my students made $5, $10 and $15 a week extra servicing sets in spare time, soon after they enrolled. I give you plans and ideas that have made good spare-time money—$200 to $1,000 a year—for hundreds of fellows. My Course is famous as "the one that pays for itself."

Money Back if Not Satisfied

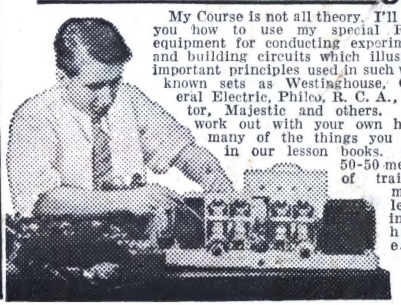
I am so sure that N. R. I. can train you at home satisfactorily that I will agree in writing to refund every penny of your tuition if you are not satisfied with my Lessons and Instruction Service upon completion. You'll get a copy of this Agreement with my book.

64-page Book of Information Free

Get your copy today. It's free to any ambitious fellow over 15 years old. It tells you about Radio's spare-time and full-time job opportunities; it tells you all about my Course; what others who have taken it are doing and making. Find out what Radio offers YOU without the slightest obligation. MAIL THE COUPON NOW.

J. E. SMITH, President
National Radio Institute
Dept. 3KD
Washington, D. C.

SPECIAL Radio Equipment for Broad Practical Experience *Given Without Extra Charge*



My Course is not all theory. I'll show you how to use my special Radio equipment for conducting experiments and building circuits which illustrate important principles used in such well-known sets as Westinghouse, General Electric, Philco, R. C. A., Victor, Majestic and others. You work out with your own hands many of the things you read in our lesson books. This 50-50 method of training makes learning at home easy.

THIS COUPON IS GOOD for *One* FREE COPY OF MY BOOK — *mail it now*

J. E. Smith, President
National Radio Institute, Dept. 3KD
Washington, D. C.

Dear Mr. Smith: Without obligating me, send your free book about spare-time and full-time Radio opportunities and how I can train for them at home in my spare time. (*Please print plainly*)

Name ..... Age.....

Address .....

City ..... State.....

Sent for $1 — Balance 10 MONTHS TO PAY

Startling Values! THAT SET A NEW STANDARD ... for Jewelry Buyers Everywhere

Smart, new styles, startling, new low prices and Royal's famous, liberal credit terms! Made possible only because of our tremendous buying power, direct diamond importations and direct sales methods.

Your Credit is as Good as Cash

Simply send $1.00 and your name and address. No embarrassment; no red tape, no delay, no interest, no extra charges. We even ship prepaid. **No C.O.D. to pay upon arrival. All dealings strictly confidential.**

10 MONTHS TO PAY
. . 10 Days Free Trial . .

Take 10 days free trial! If you can duplicate our values anywhere, return your purchase and we'll return your dollar. If satisfied pay only the small amount stated each month. Surely nothing could be simpler or fairer.

SATISFACTION ABSOLUTELY GUARANTEED

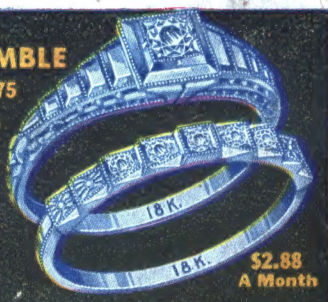
Written Guarantee Gold Bond with every diamond and watch. From start to finish your satisfaction is assured. Order today—it will be a long time before values like these are repeated. Buy by mail the Royal way and save!

THIS BEAUTIFUL

BETROTHAL ENSEMBLE

ONLY $29.75

For Both Rings



$2.88 A Month

GX-18 . . . Perfectly matched step design Engagement and Wedding Ring ensemble; hand engraved 18-K Solid White Gold Engagement ring set with fine, brilliant, genuine blue-white diamond—wedding ring with FIVE matched genuine diamonds. A regular $42.50 value. *Sale Price for Both* $29.75—$2.88 *a month.*

If Purchased Separately

GX-19 A . . . Engagement Ring Only. $19.75—$1.88 *a month.*

GX-19 B . . . Wedding Ring Only. $12.50—$1.15 *a month.*

LADIES' 5 DIAMOND RING

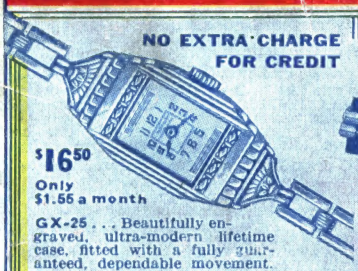
$2.65 A Month

GX-10 . . . Exquisitely hand engraved and pierced, mil-grained prong ring of 18-K Solid White Gold. Fiery, genuine blue-white diamond in center and 4 genuine diamonds on sides. A challenge to cash or credit jewelers everywhere. *Our Sale Price* $27.50—$2.65 *a mo.*

ONLY $1.59 A MONTH

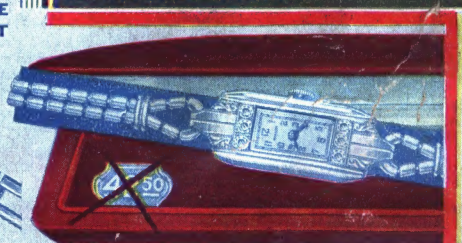
GX-4 . . . Gentleman's massive initial ring of Solid White Gold. Genuine black onyx set with a brilliant genuine diamond and any 2 initials in raised White Gold. Specify initials desired. *Special Sale Price Only* $16.95—$1.59 *a month.*

NO EXTRA CHARGE FOR CREDIT



$16.50 Only $1.55 a month

GX-25 . . . Beautifully engraved, ultra-modern lifetime case, fitted with a fully guaranteed, dependable movement. Latest style link bracelet to match. Another outstanding bargain! *Our Sale Price* $16.50—$1.55 *a month.*



6 DIAMOND BAGUETTE WRIST WATCH $29.75

Made to Sell at $42.50

Only $2.88 a Month

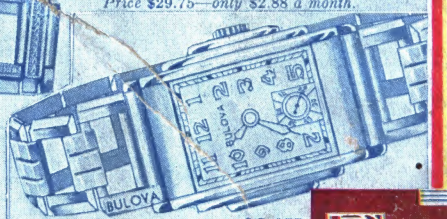
GX-24 . . . Exquisitely dainty Baguette Wrist Watch! The beautifully engraved case is set with 6 fiery, genuine diamonds and fitted with a fully guaranteed dependable movement. A value and style leader without equal! *Our Sale Price* $29.75—*only* $2.88 *a month.*

WEAR WHILE PAYING

$29.75 ELGIN ONLY $21.00

$2.00 A Month

GX-23 . . . Here's outstanding value! Nationally famous **Elgin** Wrist Watch, regularly $29.75. Now only $21.00. Handsomely engraved, new model, lifetime white case. Guaranteed dependable **Elgin** movement. Latest, engraved link bracelet to match. *Our Sale Price* $21.00—*only* $2.00 *a month.*



15 Jewel BULOVA Only $24.75

GX-26 . . . Again Royal leads with extraordinary value! **Bulova's** newest 15-Jewel Wristwatch—The "Senator"—guaranteed for accuracy and dependability and specially offered now at only $24.75. Smart, new type lifetime case and link bracelet to match. *Only* $2.37 *a month.*

FREE

Send for our latest 48 - page catalog

Illustrates hundreds of special values in genuine, blue-white diamonds; Bulova, Benrus, Elgin, Waltham, Hamilton, Howard, Illinois Watches, and other standard makes from $12.50 upward. Startling values in modern jewelry, silverware and cameras. Send for your copy today

Residents of New York are invited to call at our salesrooms.

ESTABLISHED 1895

ROYAL DIAMOND & WATCH CO.

ADDRESS DEPT. 52-X

170 BROADWAY, NEW YORK

AMERICA'S LARGEST MAIL ORDER CREDIT JEWELERS